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Editorial

The focus of the present volume of *Middle Flight* is on cultural production of the peripheral identities in literature, film and performance. The term ‘peripheral’ envisages centre-periphery relation which might give rise to unnecessary militant polarization leading to belying of the complex ground realities if not used with this caveat that it is a ‘way of reading’ – not a ‘way of being’. (Ashcroft) The recent debate around the release of *Padmavati*, a film directed by Sajay Leela Bhansali in which the alleged inclusion of a dance sequence by Padmavati, an iconic goddess-like figure of the dominant Rajput culture should be an eye opener for those of us who nurture culture-inhibitions and tend to divest art of the freedom to look at history from different perspectives – perspectives that look beyond the ‘enshrined’ and ‘established’ annals of history into hearsay, folk-lore, popular orally transmitted alternative tales, scandals, customs contrary to prevailing convention and the likes. Even if we are bent on flying with the term ‘peripheral’ it is good to maintain that awareness of multiple centres and peripheries help one understand the real nature of cultural eddies. There has been inclination to look at literature and art in terms of relations of inequality because they suggest crucial areas of difference which are often useful and offer a sense of belonging to one’s cozy culture. One writes from the periphery because one’s concerns are different, one’s themes are different and one does not often conform to the ‘placed’ canon. While awareness of differences is not something to be trumpeted about, it is, nevertheless, a potent means to counter subjugation effected by interlocking system of power and a means of rejuvenating the hitherto neglected moribund cultural systems. It helps in the shift of literature and culture from ‘mono-systems’ to ‘poly systems’. (Paranjape) Indeed, literature and culture needs to construct alternatives which involves a bit of resistance, but resistance need not necessarily be ‘reactive’, locked in a ‘prison of protest’ (Ashcroft), but can be ‘pro-active’ (Paranjape) too. Moreover, there are discourses which neither ‘write back’ nor ‘react’ to the dominant culture. There are societies that simply ‘do their own thing’ although in the process they implicate themselves in a larger world. This is what Bill Ashcroft has termed as engagement of local community with global culture.

The emergence and consolidation of Dalit and tribal literature in India is not an isolated phenomenon; it is an offshoot of the reversal of the centre-periphery relationship triggered by post-modernism, post-colonialism and identity-war. (Joseph Mewan) With modern and postmodern developments in performative and cinematic semiotics, the conflict between the centre and periphery has now been a pregnant area of critical discourse which engages with issues such as postcolonialism, psychoanalysis, partition and Diaspora studies, gender and queer studies, Dalit and tribal studies, engagement

with cultural outputs of the slaves, indigenous people, Chicanos and Chicanas, criminals, eunuchs, transvestites and other kinds of interdisciplinary ideas. Peripheral literatures in India have been mirroring social changes, conflicts and cultural shifts of society. They are connecting the vignettes to present a big canvas and are also attempting to broaden the frontiers of literature by introducing some novel images supplanting the stereotypical ones. The focus is indeed shifting from the centre to the periphery. Peripheral literature and culture is engaging readers in many different and new ways. The articles, book reviews, interview and meager translations included here address – as far as feasible within the middling flighty compass of our journal – some of the issues mentioned above.

We have arranged the entries in separate sections, thematically conceptualized. The first section focuses on ‘Postcolonial Discourses’, which includes Professor Bill Ashcroft’s seminal discussion of Postcoloniality beyond ‘grand theories’. Appended to the paper are two reviews by Prof. Krishna Sen and Prof. S. P. Singha, in response to Ashcroft’s views. Their astute observations triggered by Ashcroft’s paper have made the section truly discursive.

In the second section, we have included papers referring to the ‘mainstream’ literature, or, lesser-known texts, with an eye to locating and critically examining the notions of peripherality within such texts. Prof. Prodosh Bhattacharya’s paper takes the modern reader back to the days of heroic halls and monstrous lairs in the Anglo-Saxon epic, *Beowulf*. It is also to be noted that Old English literature has now been reduced to an almost peripheral status in the present academia; so Prof. Bhattacharya’s original and engaging approach to the representation of monstrosity in *Beowulf* offers a refreshing revival of the vigorous Anglo-Saxon spirit. Dr. Siddhartha Biswas has dealt with the question of ‘otherness’ in terms of sexuality and master-servant relationship in Harold Pinter’s play, *The Servant*. Anindita Bhowmik’s article discusses the representation of the ‘racial other’ in Wilkie Collins’ sensation novels. The creation of ‘textual peripheries’ through a Beckettian game of language has been discussed in Sambuddha Ghosh’s paper, which takes into account Samuel Beckett’s short prose-pieces as interesting resources. By using the Transformation and Materialist paradigms identified by Karen Kline, Abhirup Mascharak has studied two Hindi film adaptations of Joseph Conrad’s *Lord Jim* – one is Yash Chopra’s *Kaala Patthar* (1979) and Vishram Sawant’s *Risk* (2007) the other - concentrating on the extent to which they replicate on screen the isolation and peripherality that is central to Conrad’s oeuvre.

The third section is concerned with the emergence of autobiography - narratives of pain, resistance and historical truths hitherto neglected and usually glossed over – as a vehicle to express sub-human living conditions of Dalits. The status of ‘autobiography’ as a peripheral genre has been explored in Dr. D. Murali Manohar’s

insightful article. Dr. Murli has chosen three texts such as - Kamala Das' *My Story*, Bama's *Karukku* and P. Sivakami's *The Grip of Change*— to prove how they have posed challenge to the genre called autobiography. In their joint paper Dr. Ujjwal Jana and Vinutha P Kunderi have appositely observed that besides occupying a space through identity based narrative, Dalit autobiography provides an occasion for Dalit writers to gain constitutional rights and understanding of Dalit self. Having discussed Aravind Malagatti's (an eminent Dalit writer from Kannada) autobiography *Government Brahmana*, they have opined that Dalit autobiography has contested elitist representation of identity, society and culture.

The fourth section includes papers dealing with the representation of resistance, peripherality and marginality in Indian English writings, though some of these papers obviously incorporate issues of colonial/postcolonial history and gender. In her touching paper Shreya Bhattacharji has unearthed how in her debut short-story collection *An Unrestored Woman and Other Stories* (2016) Shobha Rao has delved deep into the collective subconscious of a deeply wounded subcontinent. Prof. Bhattacharji observes that Shobha Rao's "little histories" of the "peripheral people" seek to foreground an intentional/unintentional conspiracy of selective amnesia indulged in by all — perpetrators, victims, eyewitnesses, and historians both White and Brown. Pabitra Kr. Rana brings a psychoanalytical approach to the study of peripheral identities: his paper deals with the complicated game of self and masochism through the trope of the 'colonial pervert' in Amitav Ghosh's novel, *The Sea of Poppies*. Dr. Ujjwal Kr. Panda's paper attempts to show how an ethnocentric urge to give a separate voice to the marginal and diasporic Parsi Community of the post-independence Bombay leads Rohinton Mistry to rewrite and reexamine the mainstream Indian history (both colonial and post-colonial) from the perspective of a cultural outsider in his 1991 novel *Such a Long Journey*. Avishek Chaudhury offers a critical appraisal of Arundhati Roy's indomitable voice of resistance with reference to her essay, "How deep shall we dig?" The issues of non-belonging and oppressive privileges, so evident in discourses of human identity and existence have been discussed in Soumyadeep Chakraborty's paper, with reference to Sashi Deshpande's novel *A Matter of Time*.

The next section is rather a motley collection, though we have sought to bring them under the theme of 'New literatures: Indigenous Modes of Expression from the Periphery'. Dr. Indranil Acharya's paper provides the reader with a comprehensive and scholarly survey of marginality as represented in the indigenous literatures of Austrasia and India. Dr. Karan Singh has introduced a meaningful discussion on how in the folklore of Guga humans and animals exist at perilously close quarters wherein the boundaries between them are often blurred, leading to shifting of one being into another with a strong sense of finality. Dr. Singh has observed that Goga's mount Jaydiya reveals a linkage between the hero and the subaltern strata of society with

which he maintains intimate bonds. Having offered a theoretical grounding of the Jungian concept of individuation – a process that makes the consciousness aware of the unconscious and enables one to accept one’s self with all its strengths and limitations - Ruchi Singh has discussed how the gradual transformation of Achille in Walcott’s magnum opus *Omeros* takes place through a deeper understanding of his unconscious that is his tribal ancestral history. Ruchi Singh has obliged us indeed by giving permission to republish her article on Walcott which gives us an opportunity of commemorating Derek Walcott (23 January 1930 - 17 March 2017), who is no more. Prodosh Bhattacharya’s paper offers an interesting approach to ‘rumour’ as a performative mode of peripheral ontology. With reference to Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Wizard of the Crow*, Bhattacharya has aptly situated the performativity of rumour within the understanding of Postcolonial identity. Dr. M. B. Gaijan’s paper offers a comprehensive overview of Gujrati Dalit and Diaspora writings.

‘Gender and Periphery’ has been the focus of the sixth section, including several interesting articles. Worthy of special mention are two articles by Guru Charan Behera and Soumya Sundar Mukherjee, going back to representations of peripheral womanhood as depicted in the two great epics of India. One deals with the sacrifice of Madhavi, daughter of King Yayati, and the other attempts to read the plight of Surpanakha who, as a *Rakshasa* woman, became a victim of the Aryan *dharmic* codes, and finally gets wiped out of the narrative. Another very interesting paper contributed by Shreya Chakravorty brings together the ‘new woman’ concept and the late - Victorian vogue for the occult sciences. The author delves deep into the subversive mechanisms of Mesmerism for the creation of a parasite-like identity, often overlapping with the status of being peripheral, through a close reading of Arthur Conan Doyle’s novella, *The Parasite*. Satyarajan Das’s paper deals with the experience of Binodini Dasi, an iconic female actor of 19th century Bengali stage, but at the same time labeled as ‘fallen woman’. Mr. Das closely reads Binodini Dasi’s autobiography *Amar Katha* and her other writings, remarkably well-penned works by a woman hovering between the glamour world of the stage and the miserable social position of peripherality. In his well-researched paper, Dr. Asit Panda has focused on the representation of Dalit womanhood projected through the ‘salvation’ of Dhani Bauri in the fiction of Sunil Kumar Das. Sk. Tarik Ali’s paper deals with the woman-nature connection in Temsula Ao’s story “Laburnam for my Head”. Ali shows how this phenomenon of woman-nature association has some obvious connection with the apolitical and gender-neutral concept of Biophilia that speaks of an innate human love of and attachment to natural phenomenon. Using the story of Lentina, Temsula Ao’s female protagonist as a case study, this paper demonstrates how nature acts as the vehicle of liberation and empowerment for her when she has been forced into a voiceless existence in a male-dominated society.

Along with these papers, we are glad to include two book-reviews and an interview of Bama Faustina, the radical Dalit writer known for her autobiography, *Karukku*. Dr. Jaydeep Sarangi, the Guest-editor for the present volume has obliged us by taking the interview. For the final section some Santali poems by Sari Dharam Hansda have been translated by Pritha Kundu.

All the papers included here have been duly referred to and recommended by our esteemed reviewers. We express our sincere gratitude to Prof. Bill Ashcroft for contributing a very enlightening paper. Prof. Krishna Sen and Prof. Sankar Prasad Singha have enriched the volume by their apposite observations on Ashcroft's paper. We are also grateful to Prof. Prodosh Bhattacharya, Prof. B. Parvathi and Dr. Siddhartha Biswas for complying with our request to contribute their valuable papers. We extend our artless thanks to Dr. Indranil Acharya, a connoisseur in the field of Peripheral Literature, and one of the Associate Editors of our journal, to whom we owe the idea of focusing this volume on peripherality in literature, film and performance. We feel privileged that Dr. Jaydeep Sarangi, a bilingual poet, academician and review editor of *Contemporary Voice of Dalit* (Sage Publication) and *Transnational Literature* (Flinders University, Australia) agreed to be the Guest Editor for this special volume. The launching of the sixth volume of *Middle Flight* would hardly be possible without the unstinted support from the Principal, the Editors, the Reviewers, the Executive Members and our beloved students. Thanks to our Principal, Dr. D. K. Bhuniya and all concerned for making the publication of this special volume on Peripheral Literature, Film and Performance possible.

Jaydeep Sarangi
(Guest Editor)

Debdas Roy
Pritha Kundu
(Editors)

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Postcolonial Futures: Beyond Grand Theory

Bill Ashcroft

Thirty years ago *The Empire Writes Back* was written to bring together the textual attentiveness of Commonwealth literature and sophisticated approaches to contemporary theory that could evolve a way of reading the continuing cultural engagements of colonial societies. Looking back, it's hard to imagine a more frenetic or argumentative field of literary study than this one subsequently became over the next thirty years. Indeed, it often seemed as though to enter the field you had to critique the very idea of the postcolonial, while its demise was trumpeted by a jostling succession of Cassandras. Yet postcolonial studies has not only flourished, it has embraced its critics, channeling even their objections into the broad collective agenda of the creative cultural engagement with imperialism in all its forms. But we might ask: "What is the field of postcolonial studies beginning to look like well into the twenty first century? We might also ask: What exactly are postcolonial studies? Does this field remain within observable or even locatable boundaries?"

The term 'postcolonial' is rarely regarded as unproblematic by its exponents. Postcolonial theory may be defined as that branch of contemporary theory that investigates, and develops propositions about, the cultural and political impact of European conquest upon colonized societies, and the nature of those societies' responses. I would add some caveats to this: that the term refers to post-colonization and not post-independence, that it identifies neither a chronology nor a specific ontology – it is not 'after colonialism' nor is it a way of being. Postcolonial is a way of reading. But its sudden and remarkable rise beyond its original conception was partly due to the fact that by the late 1980s the world was hungry for a language to describe the diversity of cultures and the intersecting global range of cultural production. Postcolonial theory provided that language, a way of talking about the engagement of the global by the local, particularly local cultures, and, most importantly, provided a greatly nuanced view of globalization that developed from its understanding of the complexities of imperial relationships.

The language of postcolonialism drove the cultural turn in globalization studies in the 1990s for three reasons. First, the systematization of postcolonial theory occurred at about the same time as the rise to prominence of globalization studies in the late 1980s. Second, it was around this time that literary and cultural theorists realized that

debates on globalization had become bogged down in the classical narrative of modernity. Third, it became clear, particularly after Appadurai (1996), that there were many globalizations, and that far from the homogenizing downward pressure of economic globalization and the Washington Consensus, a circulation of local alternatives could be seen to affect the nature of the global. It was through *cultural* practices that difference and hybridity, diffusion and the imaginary, concepts that undermined the Eurocentric narrative of modernity, were most evident.

Indeed, a major feature of postcolonial studies has been its ability to analyse a vast array of cultural developments: race and racism; expressions of anti-colonial nationalism; the paradoxical dissolution of the idea of nation along with the continuous persistence of national concerns; the question of language and appropriation; of the transformation of literary genres; the question of ethnicity and its relation to the state; the growing mobility of formerly colonized populations. Despite the multiple attempts at definition and the plethora of critics sounding its death knell, this remarkable field has experienced more than its share of boundary marking, boundaries inscribed, ironically, more often by its critics and doomsayers. But the field refuses to be contained – the margins refuse to be disciplined. It is not amenable to boundaries but it does have what might be called a driving energy. It is concerned with justice and liberation and it explores this concern within the various forms of cultural engagement of colonized peoples with imperial dominance in its modes and manifestations. Broad as this may seem, it is the driving force of the field, a centrifugal rather than centripetal energy, which explains the multiplicity of approaches it stimulates. The challenge for postcolonial theorists is to avoid the temptation to view ‘postcolonialism’ as a master discourse. We need to acknowledge that it represents a rhizomatic interplay of pursuits all directed in some way towards analyzing the varied and continuing effects of imperial power. Today postcolonial studies represents a creatively undisciplined collection of ‘margins.’ It is not a Grand Theory of everything but a range of interests and approaches living together in what Amartya Sen (2005) might call an argumentative democracy. We should accept this argumentativeness as a sign of vitality, a refusal to be co-opted into a master discourse such as postmodernism, which has come to mean everything – and nothing.

Whether we like it or not, postcolonial studies now extends far beyond the original moment of colonization. The field has come to represent a dizzyingly broad network of cohabiting intellectual pursuits, circulating around the general idea of an ongoing engagement with imperial power in its various historical forms. Clearly the power dynamic of that originating moment and the forms of transformation it generated are still relevant to the range of areas of study in the field today. Postcolonial analysis has always intersected the study of race, gender, class, but these intersections have generated an ever-increasing range of specific interests, overlapping and cohabiting

within the field. I would now describe the field of postcolonial studies as a ‘convivial critical democracy’. I take the term ‘convivial’ from Paul Gilroy’s advocacy of a ‘convivial multicultural democracy’ in *After Empire: Melancholia of Convivial Culture* (2004). The term, derived from the Latin ‘con’ (with) and ‘vivere’ (to live) underpins his aim to see whether multicultural diversity can be combined with an hospitable civic order, whether a convivial acceptance of difference might be achieved in a different kind of convivial multicultural democracy than the examples presently available, particularly in Britain.

It seems to me that this etymologically faithful use of the term ‘convivial’ describes very aptly the present state of postcolonial studies. The determination of different approaches to ‘live with’ each other in a condition of productive debate and intermingling shows how the field may avoid becoming a Grand Theory. Conviviality does not obviate argument (it is not the same as *bonhomie*) but neither does argument obviate cohabitation. Because postcolonial study does not refer to a particular methodology (just as it doesn’t refer to a chronology or an ontology) this argumentativeness has been a characteristic, perhaps a *necessary* characteristic of the field from the beginning. But conviviality has led to a radical expansion, an increase in what might be classified as postcolonial pursuits, as disciplinary boundaries become more porous, cultural and national distinctiveness more rhizomic and the exploratory impetus of postcolonial scholars more pronounced.

There has always been a range of activities ‘living with’ each other in postcolonial studies: textual criticism, historical scholarship, cultural anthropology, literary theory, translation theory. There has been a rather tight but argumentative range of approaches to the questions of postcolonial engagement, centring on issues such as resistance, decolonization, the-book-or-the-barricade, on one hand and hybridity, transculturality and transformation on the other. The future of this conviviality appears to lie in the relationship between another range of fields emerging from the fluidity and permeability of global cultural relations. Cosmopolitanism, World Literature (in the Goethian mode), World Literatures, transnational literatures, as well as an expanding field of diasporic studies have all been pursued either consciously or implicitly in relation to postcolonial studies. This conviviality has led to an overlapping and at times interpenetration of what might seem to be distinct fields, all of which share an aggregation of theoretical languages. This conviviality has not been, nor should it be, without argument, for this is precisely how different ways of reading can be tested and refined. But it should be without bitterness and self-righteousness, which are the signs of philosophical insecurity.

This critical conviviality and recalcitrant border crossing has a strategic dimension that places postcolonial studies at the centre of contemporary developments in knowledge production. A transformation in critical scholarship in the humanities has

paralleled the rise of postcolonial studies over the last twenty years. The field of social epistemology, or knowledge studies, developed from about the mid 1990s has been marked by an acknowledgement that older discipline-centred forms of scholarship were being transformed. One book that initiated the present debate in knowledge studies is *The New Production of Knowledge: The Dynamics of Science and Research in Contemporary Societies*. Written by an international team led by Michael Gibbons, it was published in 1994 and has since been very widely cited in the literature on research management, because it described nothing less than a paradigm shift across the entire field of knowledge production. One of the most influential consequences of the book was its terminology (possibly because it suited governmental and institutional planners): Mode 1 represented the traditional discipline based form of research, Mode 2 the developing transdisciplinary practice. In Mode 1, “individual creativity is emphasized as the driving force of development and quality control operating through disciplinary structures organized to identify and enhance it”; knowledge is “accumulated through the professionalization of specialization largely institutionalized in universities” (9). The alternative Mode 2 research in which transdisciplinarity was the privileged form produced new knowledge not from the core of disciplines, but in the “interstices” between them, the pressure of innovation causing their boundaries to become increasingly “fuzzy” (Gibbons 1994: 147).

I am not suggesting that postcolonial studies are necessarily interdisciplinary in the radical institutional way this concept emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. It conforms more closely to a conception of discipline-based interdisciplinarity represented by Julie Thompson Klein’s *Interdisciplinarity: History, Theory, and Practice* (1990), and *Crossing Boundaries: Knowledge, Disciplinarity and Interdisciplinarity* (1996). Thompson Klein’s argument is that at present new knowledge is most often produced by boundary crossing in the form of interdisciplinary and cross-cultural research, and that this tends to be located in the shadow structures—the dynamic, informal networks and collaborations that form beneath and across the surface structures.

Today such interdisciplinarity can be found in postcolonial studies in the research of people working from a strong disciplinary base and venturing across boundaries of all kinds – not just disciplinary but cultural, racial, ethnic and linguistic boundaries. This, of course, is not new to literary scholars. The actual porosity of the boundaries of ‘English Literature’ is recognized by anyone researching for a Ph. D. But this boundary crossing becomes more prevalent in postcolonial studies as critics and scholars become committed to the worldliness of the text. For Said, the worldliness of the text is its *situatedness*, its “status as an event having sensuous particularity as well as historical contingency . . . incorporated in the text itself, an infrangible part of its capacity for conveying and producing meaning’ (1983:39). For historical reasons the disciplinary base of postcolonial scholars has been dominated by literary studies, and this involved,

from the very beginning, a powerful compulsion to engage the text as a cultural practice. Despite the celebrity of poststructuralist colonial discourse theorists (who have, unfortunately appeared to represent the whole field to the wider community) most scholars in the field have been committed to revealing the material and discursive connections between the text and its cultural grounding. Where literatures in English were concerned the dismantling of the *filiative* relationship with the canon of English literature was accompanied by a commitment to explore the full range of cultural *affiliations* – the worldliness – of the literature written by formerly colonized people. Because of its constant interplay between the analysis of specific cultural materialities and the production of more global explanatory theories the field has by its very nature always pushed against disciplinary boundaries.

Some time ago I suggested that postcolonial studies were characterized by excess: an excess of insistence, of supplementarity and hybridity (Ashcroft 1994). To its detractors this tendency to excess seems just too much, too insistent, and to some a sign of unrecoverable fragmentation, the evaporation of some phantom methodological core. But this excess of supplementarity has been the strength of postcolonial studies, not only in its numerous approaches but also in the range of its disciplinary border crossings. Consider the aggregation of interests, subjects and approaches that may gather under the ambit of postcolonial studies: affect studies; autobiography; Dalit studies; diaspora studies; gender studies; Indigenous studies; linguistics; migration; Orientalism; transcultural theory; transnationalism; trauma studies and translation studies. It engages in debate with coterminous fields such as World Literature, deals with overlapping concepts such as cosmopolitanism, and examines the literary dimension of ethics and human rights. It addresses contemporary global issues such as terrorism, neo-imperialism, globalization and the postmodern state, while maintaining a tradition of close attention to individual writers, particularly those from formerly colonized nations. From the evidence of this collection the field overlaps the disciplines of anthropology, history, sociology, political science, psychology, even physiology, as well as extending radically the orbit of literary studies. As a way of reading, postcolonialism now extends into various realms of contemporary social politics and refuses to be confined. Clearly postcolonial studies is too dynamic and unruly to police. It has become a field with rich pasture and few fences.

Futures

In 2001 I published a book entitled *Postcolonial Futures* and it seems as though the turn of the century had an unavoidable impact on considerations of the future of this field. A plethora of books circling around the general themes of ‘Beyond Postcolonial Theory’ ‘Postcolonial Futures’ ‘The Future of Postcolonial Studies’ ‘Postcolonial Studies in the 21st Century’ including a chapter on the future in the second edition of *The*

Empire Writes Back emerged in the first decade. I am tempted to join this party once again and write another book on postcolonial futures, in which case I would include postcolonial developments and interactions such as Transnation, Transculturalism, Multiple Modernities, World Literature, Cosmopolitanism, The Sacred, Environment and Utopianism. An interesting development from Latin America is the rhetoric of Decolonialism, which posits a distinction from postcolonial theory but stands very solidly on the foundation of postcolonial assertions of the continuation of imperial power. Most of these interactions have either emerged or grown stronger in the first two decades of the century. Perhaps the consequence of a history of boundary crossing has been the congenital habit of postcolonial scholars to question existing formulations of the field. But far from being a sign of nervous insecurity, futurism was embedded in the term from the beginning, because the principles of postcolonial engagement had such manifestly global implications. Postcolonial theory became useful for approaching neocolonial, neo-imperial and global power dynamics.

One example of this expanding reach is World Literature, an interaction addressed in recent essays by Frank Schultz-Engler who assesses the place of postcolonial studies in relation to it, and Debjani Ganguli, who indicates some of the more intractable problems of this formation. Working from somewhat different standpoints, both critics point out the considerable gap between world literature's utopian conception of the 'world' and its actual imperialistic formulation. World literature (not *literatures*) has become attractive to many postcolonial theorists, possibly because like cosmopolitanism, it suggests an ethical dimension. It emerges, ostensibly, in Goethe's ideal of *Weltliteratur* – the dream of 'a common world literature transcending national limits' – an ideal more of its own time than ours. Despite their attempts the various proponents of world literature fail to avoid the traps that lie within Goethe's original ideal. The parties to Goethe's imagined conversation transcending national limits are invariably national literatures and World literature concerns the relationship of nation and nation. But if we take into account oral and traditional literatures within nations these are engaged in no other conversation but one with their own readers. In the more interesting case of postcolonial writers appropriating English and thus choosing a world audience of English speakers, the conversation is not between nations, neither does it claim to be a world conversation. More troubling is the privileged place accorded European literatures in the world by Goethe, a privilege leading directly to an almost parodic Eurocentrism in theories such as Casanova's, in which the Franco-centric, and indeed Paris-centric structure of world literature rehearses one of the more outmoded aspects of imperial geometry. Ganguly finds a way out of the Eurocentric quagmire towards a postcolonial conception of World literatures. But the term 'world literature' begs the question of who can be included. First, who can be included in the world, and who can be included in literature. Neither of these memberships is very clear. While the aim of

World Literature is to transcend the fixation on national literatures, every consideration of such literature is organised on national lines. 'Literature,' on the other hand, seems to exclude everything but writing. While the interests of postcolonial literary studies lies principally in written texts, the presence and importance of oral literatures in the field is a given. Even more important perhaps is the transformation of 'Literature' under the influence of those oral and vernacular appropriations of English. Ultimately the 'conversation' of world literature is between writer and readers, not writers and writers.

A related, if not cognate idea with which postcolonial studies interacts is described by the increasingly popular term 'cosmopolitanism.' Although this term seems entirely congruent with Gilroy's idea of a convivial multicultural democracy the relationship between cosmopolitanism and postcolonial is not entirely unproblematic. Many postcolonial theorists have enthusiastically adopted this notoriously slippery concept, first, because it is a much more politically acceptable term for multiculturalism, but also because it appears to have at its centre a profoundly attractive ethical dimension. Building on Kant and Levinas, Ulf Hannerz defines the cosmopolitan as: '...an orientation, a willingness to engage with the Other. It entails an intellectual and aesthetic openness toward divergent cultural experiences, a search for contrasts rather than uniformity' (1996: 103). This is directly reminiscent of Levinas in *Totality and Infinity* when he suggests that 'to receive from the Other beyond the capacity of the I', is 'to have the idea of infinity'. Whenever I mention Levinas Patrick Williams reminds me that Levinas's own acceptance of the other did not extend to the Palestinians. This alerts us to the fact that we should not confuse ideas with their originators, and even more importantly that cosmopolitan openness is a utopian project, of deep ethical importance to a postcolonial vision of the future, but one that might always seem to lie just ahead of our capacity to realise it. This place in the future does not make it any less imperative.

The ethical dimension of cosmopolitan theory is its great strength and I admire its utopian orientation. But while 'cosmopolitan' is a useful adjective it is a failure as a noun. Hong Kong and Shanghai, London and New York may be described as 'cosmopolitan spaces', but who is 'the cosmopolitan'? Within the cultural space of the 'cosmopolitan city' which category of its citizens may be constituted cosmopolitan subjects: expatriates, multi-lingual locals? Which narrative of identity in the transitional, open and exogenous space of the world city frames a cosmopolitan subject? Who, exactly, is a cosmopolitan? What are we going to do with *Cosmopolitan* magazine? Nevertheless, the rapid movement of postcolonial studies into the global dimensions of diaspora, transnationalism and transculturalism means that the ethical dimension of cosmopolitanism, of openness to the other, will be increasingly taken into account. Being "at home in the world" appeals directly to postcolonialism's critique of the

nation and its discourses of exclusion.

This leads me to a direction that my work is taking in the field. The Utopian Studies society was formed in 1988, around the same time the *Empire Writes Back* was published. It has developed an international and a European branch, a journal, a membership almost as large as ACLALS, but with the exception of one uninspiring book in 2004 postcolonial studies has had no contact with the field whatsoever. This is possibly because, despite Marx's professed repudiation of utopias, Utopian theory has been dominated in the latter half of the twentieth century by a combination of Marxism and science fiction. Utopianism is important, says Fredric Jameson because the end of the world is easier to imagine than the end of capitalism.

Postcolonialism has had an interesting relationship with Marxism over the same period. While the importance of Marxism to the decolonising rhetoric of African writers like Ngugi, and the Subaltern Studies group in South Asia has been clear, the attacks of critics such as Aijaz Ahmad and Arif Dirlik on postcolonialism as a repository of a metropolitan comprador intelligentsia have added considerable spice to the rather frenetic conviviality of the field. It is therefore somewhat ironic that I see a future direction for postcolonial criticism in a discourse dominated by Marxists over the last half-century or so. If a genre of postcolonial utopianism can be identified it does so by means of a different but overlapping set of relations to that proposed by Marxism: the relation between liberation, nationalism and the nation-state; between the sacred and the secular; between memory and the future and between the material conditions of postcolonial societies and the particular nature of their imagined possibilities. For most contemporary utopian theory Utopia is no longer a place but the spirit of hope itself, the essence of desire for a better world. For Fredric Jameson 'practical thinking' everywhere represents a capitulation to the system. "The Utopian idea, on the contrary, keeps alive the possibility of a world qualitatively distinct from this one and takes the form of a stubborn negation of all that is." (Jameson 1971: 110-11). Nothing better describes the orientation of postcolonial writing, which is everywhere suffused with utopian thought. It is therefore logical that future thinking should describe the future direction of this protean and diverse field.

An example of the ways in which postcolonial developments try to announce themselves as distinctive is the growing field of Decolonialism. This emerges from Latin American scholars, such as Walter D. Mignolo, working mainly in the US. The principle assertion is that neither imperialism nor colonialism ended with colonial independence but continues today in the global dominance of imperial forces. Theorists of decoloniality such as Maldonado Torres (2004), Anibal Quijano (2007) and Walter D. Mignolo (2011) have situated decoloniality in the context of new globalist attempts by Europe and the United States to maintain relations of coloniality (epistemologically,

economically, culturally etc.) with the former colonised world. Viewed from this perspective, decoloniality entails delinking from the West to pursue ‘other’ epistemes and ways of being that have been side-lined by colonial modernity. This theory has recognizable echoes of Nkrumah’s concept of Neo-colonialism and one fundamental principle of postcolonial theory is that the ‘post’ is not chronological, not ‘after colonialism’ but ‘after invasion’, an invasion that continues today in various and sometimes more subtle ways.

Postcolonial theory will always, I think, be under pressure to be a grand theory of everything. Because it provided a language to describe the global inheritance of imperial power structures in the 80s, it seems to have remained under pressure to become a theory of the world by those for whom it is simply a convenient way of talking about the non-West. But the multi-disciplined, even undisciplined tendencies of its practitioners, the insistence of marginal interests, the convivial argumentativeness of its multiple approaches, irritating though this may be sometimes, may well continue to be its greatest strength.

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**On “Postcolonial Futures: Beyond Grand Theory” by Bill
Ashcroft**

Krishna Sen

“*Middle Flight* and you are extremely fortunate to have this important and timely essay. There can be nothing more significant than a review of the future of postcolonialism than one by the person who initiated the theory. I notice that he has finally accepted the inevitable and dropped the hyphen! Please print the essay just as it stands.”

Reflections on “Postcolonial Future”

Sankar Prasad Singha

Since the publication of Lyotard's *Postmodern Condition* in 1979, one of the respectable tendencies in the field of literary studies is a distrust for all kinds of grand narratives. Professor Ashcroft's paper cogently argues along this line to establish that postcolonial studies is not a 'master discourse' or a "Grand theory of everything but a range of interests and approaches" that circulates around the general idea of an ongoing engagement with imperial power in its various historical forms. There is no doubt that postcolonial studies does not have the rigorous framework of a conventional theory and it "represents a rhizomatic interplay of pursuits all directed in some ways towards analyzing the varied and continuing effects" of colonization. That it refuses to be tied down to a rigidity of theoretical framework was pointed out by Terry Eagleton way back in 1983. The range of issues covered by the term postcolonialism is really huge as are the kinds of readings performed in its name. It cohabits with multifarious critical schools like textual criticism, historical criticism, Marxist criticism, culture studies, translation studies, diaspora studies etc. and is related to such expanding forms of literature as World Literatures, New Literatures, Transnational Literatures, Diasporic Literatures etc. The field also overlaps the disciplines of sociology, anthropology, history, political science, psychology and even physiology apart of course, from literary studies. Any facile attempt towards homogenization of such a dizzyingly broad network of intellectual pursuits will inevitably be self-defeating. Professor Ashcroft, therefore, champions the idea latent in Paul Gilroy's phrase 'convivial multicultural democracy' to describe the present state of postcolonial studies. He envisages a state of affairs where the diverse approaches will coexist in a condition of productive debate obviating the possibility of being socketed into a Grand Theory. He points out, in this connection, that this 'critical conviviality' is coterminous with the contemporary developments in knowledge production where traditional discipline-centred scholarship is gradually being replaced by an insistent emphasis on interdisciplinarity. This is a brilliantly argued summing up of the present state of postcolonial studies which now extends into various realms of contemporary social politics involving the dalits, the refugees, the minorities, be it religious, linguistic, ethnic or any other that is people subjected to marginalization in any form.

The idea of 'convivial multicultural democracy' which Ashcroft finds in the

contemporary state of postcolonial studies is then extended to the political field of cosmopolitanism which presupposes “a willingness to engage with the Other”. Thus he dreams of a future where differences will be celebrated rather than suppressed, heterogeneity and diversity will take precedence over homogeneity and uniformity. He is well aware of the utopian nature of the dream that he envisages for the future. He is also alive to the attacks of critics like Aijaz Ahmed and Arif Dirlik and knows fully well how through Ne-colonialism Europe and the United States still maintain relations of coloniality with the former colonized states. In spite of all this, he still believes in the idea of a qualitatively different world where otherness will be respected, differences celebrated and disagreements honoured. This is, no doubt, a very noble hope but very hard to sustain in the current global context. With the resurgence of right wing politics across the globe, the implications of Brexit in Great Britain and the change of guard in the United States, the hope of such a paradisiacal state of affairs on the earth is fast receding away into the wilderness. But ‘the spirit of hope’ which represents Utopia for many will never die, will always keep us awake to welcome a better world. Likewise, the field of postcolonial studies will continue to draw our attention to geographical, historical, political, social and cultural differences but at the same time will inspire us to think between and across such differences. This is what Edward Said suggested in the famous ‘Afterword’ that he appended in 1995 to his monumental work *Orientalism* which really spawned the diversity of approaches that are associated with postcolonialism.

I congratulate the *Middle Flight* and its editors on getting such an illuminating essay from Professor Bill Ashcroft who is probably best suited to write on such a topic.

The Peripheral against the Mainstream: The Antagonists and the Hero in *Beowulf*

Prodosh Bhattacharya

Introduction

Beowulf is, in the judgment of this writer, an almost flawless hero, absurd hamartia-hunting about his pursuit of the dragon-hoard at the end notwithstanding. In the first part of the poem he is offset largely by two humanoid monsters, Grendel and his mother, and in the second part by the dragon, all three peripheral creatures, with regard to both inner nature and physical habitation, to human civilization. This paper will concentrate on the comparative stature of these four.

Grendel

The entry of Grendel in the poem precedes that of our hero. In fact, it is only after Grendel's twelve-year-long depredations at Heorot and the helplessness of the Danes is described that we hear of Beowulf:

Đá se ellengaést	earfoðlice		Then the bold spirit,	impatiently
þragegeþolode	séþe in		endured dreary time,	he who dwelt in
þýstrumbád			darkness,	
þæthédógoragehwám			he that every day	heard noise of
dréamgehýrde			revelry	
hlúdne in healle			loud in the hall.	
			(ll. 86 – 89 ^a)	

wæs se grim magaést	Grendel		this ghastly demon was	
háten			named Grendel,	
maéremearcstapa			infamous stalker in the	
séþemórashéold			marches,	he who held the moors,
fen ondfæsten			fen and desolate strong-hold;	the
ffiflcynnesearð			land of marsh-monsters,	
wonsaélfwer	weardodehwíle		the wretched creature	ruled for a
			time	
siþðan him scyppend			since him the Creator	had
forscrifenhæfde			condemned	
in Caines cynne			with the kin of Cain;	that killing
þonecwealmgewræc			avenged	

écedrihten þæs þe hé Ábelslóg·		the eternal Lord, in which he slew Abel;
ne gefeahhþaérefaéhðe ac hé hine feorforwræc		this feud he did not enjoy, for He drove him far away,
metod for þýmáne mancynnefram·		the Ruler, for this crime, from mankind;
þanonuntýdras ealle onwócon		thence unspeakable offspring all awoke:
eotenasondylfe ondorcneás		ogres and elves and spirits from the underworld;
swylce gí gantas þáwiðgode wunnon		also giants, who strove with God
lange þrage· hé him ðæsléanforgeald.		for an interminable season; He gave them their reward for that ¹ (ll. 102 – 114)

He is a formidable antagonist, though physically peripheral, inhabiting the marshes and fens outside the human habitation of the Danes. Spiritually too, he is peripheral, the offspring of the ultimate exile, the First Murderer, Cain. His strength and his ability to inflict damage are described in gory detail. He seizes thirty men at a time during his first visit, and soon the Danish *comitatus* abandon Heorot to seek *gerumlicorræste* (l. 139), ‘repose farther away’, in the ancillary buildings (*buras*), which, as Michael Swanton points out, mostly ‘provided lodging for women (‘bower’), or for cattle (‘byre’).’ He goes on to add that this makes ‘the demoralizing effects of Grendel’s depredations ... clear.’² That the peripheral has usurped the place of the mainstream is established by the ironic application of the sobriquet *healðegn* (l. 141^a), ‘hall-thane’, to Grendel. The poet says that he

sinnihte hield		in the endless night he held
mistigemóras·		the misty moors;

(ll. 161^b – 162^a)

Heoroteardode		he dwelt in Heorot,
sincfágesel swearturnihtum		the richly-adorned hall, in the black nights
		(ll. 166 ^b – 167 ^a)

However, his peripheral, and indeed exclusionary, status is simultaneously reinforced:

— no he þone gifstol gretanmoste —by no means he the gift-throne
was compelled to approach respectfully,
maðþum for metode, ne his mynwisse the treasure, by the Maker, nor
did he feel love for it— (ll. 168-69)

Beowulf, on his part, considers the monster his inferior, and decides to divest himself of weaponry and armour in order that he may encounter the antagonist on equal terms:

hæbbeicéacge-áhsod þætséaégláeca	I have also heard that the evil creature
for his wonhýdum waépna ne recceð·	in his recklessness heeds not weapons;
icþætþonneforhicge -- swáméHigelácsie	then I it scorn --so that for me Hygelac may be
mínmondrihten módesblíðe	my liege-lord blithe in his heart--
þæticsweordbere oþðesídnescyld	that I bear a sword or broad shield,
geolorandtógúþe ac ic mid grápesceal	<u>yellow-rim</u> to war, but I with my grip shall
fónwiðféonde ondymbfeorhsacan,	fight with this fiend and over life strive,
láðwiðlápum· ðaérgelýfansceal	enemy against enemy; there must trust in
dryhtnesdóme sébehinedéaðnimeð·	the judgement of the Lord, whichever one that Death takes; (ll. 433-431)

The battle between the two has an awesome build up. The approach of Grendel evokes fearsome anticipation of unimaginable violence to follow, an expectation that is proved right:

Ðácóm of móre under místhleoþum	Then came from the moor under the misty cliffs
Grendel gongan· godesyrrebær·	Grendel walking, God's wrath he bore;
mynte se mánscaða manna cynnes	the vile ravager meant from mankind
sumnebesyrwan in seleþámhéan·	a sample to snare in the high hall;
wód under wolcnum tóþæsþehéwínreced	he waded under the clouds until he the wine-hall,
goldselegumena gearwostwisse	--the gold-hall of men-- mostly- certainly saw,
faéttumfáhne· ne wæspæt forma síð	shining gold; it was not the first time
þæthéHróþgáres hámgésóhte·	(ll. 710 – 17)

Cómpá to recede	rincsíðian		He came then to the hall the fighter journeying,
dréamumbedaéled·	durusónaonarn		cut-off from merriment; the door soon rushed open,
fýrbendumfæst	syþðanhé hire		firm with fire-forged bands, when he tapped it with his folmumæthrán
onbraédþábealohýdig			plotting evil then he tore open, ðáhébolgenwæs, now that he was enraged,
recedes múþan·	raþeæfterþon		the mouth of the building; straight after that
on fágneflór	féondreddode·		on the tessellated floor the fiend treaded,
éodeyrremód·	him of éagumstód		advanced angrily; from his eyes issued,
liggegelicost	léohtunfaéger·		most like a flame, a distorted light;

... (ll. 720 – 27)

Þá his móðáhlóg:		Then his heart laughed:
myntepæthégedaélde		he intended to deprive,
aérþondægawóme		ere the day came,
atolágláeca		the cruel beast, from
ánragehwylces		each one
lífwiðlice þá him		life from body, now
álumpenwæs		had befallen him
wistfyllewén.		a hope of a full feast.

... (ll. 730^b – 35^a)

Né þæt se ágláeca	yldanþóhte		That the monster did not think to delay,
ac hégefenghraðe	formansíðe		but he quickly grasped, at the first occasion,
slaépendnerinc	slátunwearnum		a sleeping warrior, rended without restraint,
bátbánlocan·	blóðédrumdranc·		bit into the bone-locks, from the veins drank blood,
synsnaédumswealh·	sónahæfde		swallowed great chunks; soon he had
unlyfigendes	ealgefeormod		the unliving one all devoured,
fétondfolm·	forðnéaratstóp		feet and hands; nearer he stepped forth,
(ll. 739 – 45)			

The fight itself does establish the protagonist's superiority quickly enough. So far, Grendel has not encountered any opposition in Heorot, and Beowulf resisting him rouses fear in the monster. Nevertheless, it does put up a fight. The hall resounds, and the poet says that it was a miracle that Heorot withstood the devastating conflict. Eventually:

icsárgebád		body-pain he felt,
atolaéglaéca· him on eaxlewearð		the awful ogre; on his shoulder was
syndolhsweotol· seonoweonsprungon·		a great wound apparent, sinows sprang asunder,
burstonbánlocan· Béowulfewearð		bone-locks burst; to Beowulf was
gúðhréðgyfeþe· scolde Grendel þonan		war-glory given; thence Grendel had to
feorhséocfléon under fenhleoðu,		flee <u>sick unto death</u> under the hills of the fen,
séceanwynléaswíc· wisteþégeomor		to seek his joyless abode; he knew it more surely
þæt his aldreswæs endegegongen		that was his life's end arrived,
dógeradægrím.		the day-count of his days.(ll. 815 ^b – 23 ^a)

One may argue from this account that, in spite of the initial build-up, it is the protagonist who emerges as the dominant persona so far.

Grendel's Mother

We only get to hear of the next antagonist after Grendel's departure. Grendel's Mother does not attack unprovoked as her son had, but because she wants to avenge the mortal wound inflicted on her son at Heorot. Unlike with the build-up when Grendel was introduced, the poet is at pains to emphasize that she is a lesser threat:

wæs se gryrelaéssa		the horror was less
efneswámicle swábiðmægþacræft		by even so much, as is maid's strength,
wíggryrewífes bewaéþned men		--the war-violence of woman-- from an armed man,
þonneheorubunden hameregeþuren		when adorned blade, by hammer forged,
sweordswátefáh swínoferhelme		--sword stained with blood-- the boar-crest
ecgumdyhttig andweardscireð.		by edges firm, the opposing (helmet) is sheared.

... (ll. 1282^b – 87)

And once she is found, she is frightened, and in a hurry to get away to her periphery, as her son had been:

héowæs on ofste· woldeúþanon,		she was in haste, wanted out of there,
féorebeorgan þáhéoonfundenwæs·		to protect her life, when she was discovered;
hraðhéoaþelinga ánnhæfde		quickly she a noble one had
fæstebefangen· þáhéotófenne gang·		seized tightly, then she went to the fen;

(ll. 1292 – 95)

Hrothgar now proceeds to establish, even more vividly than the narrator had earlier, the geographical – and spiritual – peripherality of Grendel and his mother in a justly-celebrated passage:

Icþætlondbúend léodemíne		I it, land-dwellers, my people,
seleraédende secganhýrde		hall-counsellors have heard tell
þæthíegesáwon swylcetwégen		that they saw two such
miclemearcstapan mórashealdan,		massive marchers of no-man's land haunting the moors,
ellorgaéstas· ðáéraóðerwæs		alien spirits; one of them was,
þæsþehíegewislícost gewitanmeahton		as they most certainly were able to discern,
ideseonlícnaes· óðerearmsceapen		of the likeness of a woman; the other one wretchedly shaped
on wereswæstmum wraéclástastræd		in the form of a man trod in the tracks of an exile,
næfnehéwæsmára þonneaénig man óðer·		except he was larger than any other man;
þone on géardagum Grendel nemdon		in days of yore him 'Grendel' named
foldbúende· nóhíefædercunnon·		the earth-dwellers; they did not know of his father,
hwæþer him aénigwæs aérácenned		whether of them any were born previously
dymragásta. Híedýgellond		of obscure spirits. They a secret land
warigeaðwulfhleoþu windigenæssas		inhabited, wolf-slopes, windy water-capes,
frécnefengelád ðáerfyrgenstréam		a dangerous passage over the fen- waters, where mountain-stream
under næssagenipu niþergewíteð		under the darkness of the headlands descended downward,

flód under foldan· nispætfeorheonon	the flood under the earth; it is not that far hence
mílgemearces þæt se mere standeð·	in mile-marks, that the mere stands;
oferþaémhongiað hrímgebearwas·	over it hangs frost-covered groves,
wudu wyrstumfæst wæteroferhelmað·	tree held fast by its roots overshadows the water;
þaérmægnihtagehwaém níðwundorséon	there one may every night a horrible marvel see:
fýr on flóde· nóþæsfróðleofað	fire on the water; not even the wise of them lives,
gumenabearna þætþonegrundwite.	of men's sons, that knows the bottom.
Ðeahþehaéðstapa hundungeswenced	Though the <u>heath-stepper</u> harrassed by hounds,
heorothornumtrum holtwuduséce	the hart with strong horns, seeks the forest,
feorangeflymed· aérhéfeorhseleð	put to flight from far, first he will give up his life,
aldor on ófre aérhé in wille	existence on the shore, before he will (leap) in
hafelanhelan· nispæthéorustów·	to hide his head; it is not a pleasant place;
þononyðgeblond úpástígeð	thence a maelström of the waves rises up,
won tówolcnum þonne wind styreþ	dark to the clouds, when the wind stirs
láðgewidru oðþætlyftdrysmæþ·	grievous storms, until the air grows dark,
roderasréotað.	the skies weep. (ll. 1343 – 75 ^a)

However, once Beowulf visits her lair at the bottom of the mere, she assumed the upper hand in a manner her son was never capable of:

Geféngþá be eaxle --nalas for faéhðemearn--		Grabbed her then by the shoulder --not in the least regretting the feud--
Gúð-Géataléod, Grendlesmóðor·		the prince of the War-Geats, Grendel's mother;
brægdþábeadwe heard þáhébolgenwæs		the hard man of conflict then heaved, now that he was enraged,
feorhgeniðlan þæthéo on fletgebéah·		the deadly foe, so that she fell to the floor;
héo him eft hraþe handleanforgeald		she again him quickly gave <u>hand-reward</u>
grimmangrúpum ond him tógéanesféng·		with wrathful grips and clutched him against herself;
oferwearpþáwérigmód wigenastrengest		then, weary in spirit, he stumbled, the strongest man,
féþecempa þæthéo on fyllewearð·		warrior on foot, so that he was in a fall;
ofsætþáþoneselegyst ondhyreseaxgetéah		then she bestrode the guest in her hall, and drew her <u>seax</u> ,
bráðondbrúnecg· wolde hire bearnwrecan		broad and bright-edged; she wished to avenge her son,
ánganeafaran· him on eaxlelæg		only offspring; on his shoulder lay
bréostnetbróden; þætgebearhféore		woven <u>breast-net</u> ; it protected life,
wiðordondwiðecge ingangforstóð.		against point and against edge it withstood entry.

... (ll. 1537 – 55)

Several factors need to be noted. To meet the ‘lesser’ terror, Beowulf has put on armour and has been lent Hrunting, Unferth’s sword. As noted above, to fight Grendel he had divested himself of both armour and sword. Admittedly, Grendel was being fought in a region which belonged to human beings, while Beowulf is fighting Grendel’s mother in *her* lair, which would justify the appendages. However, as we can see, in her lair, Grendel’s mother sits astride our hero, and it is not the latter’s prowess, but his armour, made by Weland the Smith (l. 455^a), that saves his life. Also, God has not willed the death of Beowulf yet. It is God again, who directs Beowulf’s attention to the giant sword, the *ealdsweordeotenisc* (l. 1558^a), in the lair of the monsters which alone has the power to kill them, unlike the manmade Hrunting which fails when Beowulf hits Grendel’s mother with it. When Grendel met Beowulf’s resistance in Heorot, he was immediately frightened and wished to get away. Not so Grendel’s

mother in her own abode; she was frightened in Heorot purely on being found out, but here, detecting Beowulf's intrusion into a region where no man has been before, she grabs and carries him in. Then, as we have seen above, she proves a match for our protagonist, and it is only divine help which saves him and enables him to destroy her.

The Dragon

The geographical peripherality of the dragon is never in question, given the kind of creature it is. Unlike Grendel, it is not antagonized by any sound of human community living. It attacks because someone infiltrates its den to steal an item of the treasure it is guarding:

stánbeorhstéarcne· stíg under læg eldumuncúð. Þær on innangíong niðanáthwylc ondnéahgeféng haéðnum horde· hondgewríþenne since fáhne héþætsyððan beget þeahðehéslaépende besyredhæfde þeofescræfte· þætsiéðíodonfand búfolcbeorna þæthégebolgenwæs.	a stark stone barrow; the path below lay unknown to men. There went inside a man, I know not which, and he groped near the heathen hoard, his hands <u>wrapped</u> <u>round</u> an ornamented bauble, he <u>got</u> that afterwards; though <u>he</u> who sleeping had been tricked by thief's cunning; the people discovered that, theneighbouring folk of men, that <u>he</u> was enraged. (ll. 2213 – 2220)
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More than Grendel who had targetted merely one of Hrothgar's halls, the dragon ravages the entire Geatish kingdom:

Ðá se gæstongan glédumspíwan, beorhthofubærman· bryneléom astód eldum on andan· nóðaéráhtcwices láðlyftfloga laéfanwolde· wæspæswyrmeswíg wídegesy ne nearofágesníð néanondfeorran· hú se gúðsceaða Géataléode hatodeondhýnde·	Then the demon began to spew flames, to burn bright houses; the gleam of fire rose to the horror of the men; nor there anything alive the hateful air-flier wished to leave; the war-strength of that wyrm was widely seen, the malice of the darkly cunning one near and far, how the war-scather the people of the Geats hated and humiliated; (ll. 2312 – 19 ^a)
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When our hero is informed of this last adversary, we are told:

wénde se wisa þæthéwealdende		the wise man thought that he the Ruler
oferealderiht éceandryhtne		against ancient law eternal Lord
bitregebulge· bréostinnanwéoll		had bitterly angered; inside his breast welled
þéostrumgeþoncum swá him geþýwe ne wæs.		with thoughts of gloom, such was not usual for him.
Hæfdeligdraca léodafæsten		The fire-drake had the fortress of the people,
éalondútan eorðweardðone		by the coast-land, the stronghold
glédumforgrunden·		ground down with flames;

(ll. 2329 – 35^a)

For the first time, Beowulf's so-far indomitable morale is affected – by a beast. The two humanoid monsters had not had this effect on him, so much so, that Hrothgar, in his 'sermon' (ll. 1700 – 69), had had to warn him against pride generated by his achievements.

Admittedly, Beowulf soon regains his spirit:

Oferhogodeða hringafengel		Then he scorned, the rings' lord,
þæthéþonewidflogan weorodegesóhte		that he the wide-flier would seek out with a troop,
sídanherge· nóhé him þámsæcceondred		a large army; he did not the strife dread for himself,
né him þæs wyrmeswíg for wihtdyde		nor him the wyrm's fire esteem a bit,

(ll. 2343 – 49)

Once the battle begins, we are reminded of the setback Beowulf suffered against Grendel's mother. Against the dragon, too, Beowulf's sword fails. In fact, when he strikes with it a second time, Nægling bursts asunder. What is more, his *comitatus* do not come to his aid in their cowardice, with the solitary exception of Wiglaf. Thus, Beowulf's prowess is further diminished. This is no longer a single combat as the two earlier ones had been. He has the unasked-for yet vital help of one of his thanes, without which Beowulf would not have been able to kill the beast.

Þáwæsþéodsceaða þriddansíðe		Then the scourge of people a third time,
frécnefýrdraca faéhðagemyndig·		the fierce fire-drake enmity in mind,
raésde on ðonerófan þá him rúmágeald		rushed at the brave man, when <u>he was yielded space</u> .
hátondheaðogrim heals ealneymbefēng		hot and battle-fierce, (Beowulf's) whole neck he clamped
biteranbánum· hégeblódegodwearð		between sharp fangs; he was drenched
sáwuldríore· swátýðumwéoll.		in life-blood; gore gushed in waves. (ll. 2688 – 93)

It is Wiglaf who has the intelligence to ignore the dragon's head and strike it lower down, where traditionally dragons have their weak point:

ne héddehéþæsheafolan ac sío hand gebarn		he did not heed (the dragon's) head, though the hand was burned
módigesmannes þaérhé his mægeneshealp		of the spirited man, there he his strength helped,
þæt he þoneníðgæst niðorhwéneslôh,		that he <u>the hostile outsider</u> struck somewhat lower,
secg on searwum þætðætsweordgedéaf		the warrior in his war-gear, so that the sword sank in
fáhondfaéted þætðætfýrongon		gleaming and golden so that the fire began
sweðriansyððan. Þágénsylfcyni ng		to weaken after that. Then again the king himself
gewéold his gewitte· wællseaxegebraéd		gathered his wits, drew a slaughter-seax
biter ondbeaduscearp þæthé on byrnanwæg·		bitter and battle-sharp, that he wore on his byrnie;
forwratWedra helm wurm on middan.		The Helm of the Wederascut through the wurm in the middle.
Féondgefyldan -- ferhellenwræc--		The foe they felled --their courage driving out life--
ondhihyneþábégen ábrotenhæf don,		and then the both of them him had destroyed, (ll. 2697 – 2707)

The glory of the victory is no longer single, but shared. Beowulf alone would not have been able to defeat this non-human adversary, which, unlike its humanoid predecessors, has already given our hero his death-wound.

Conclusion

It is a truth, if not universally acknowledged, at least often experienced as true, that, in narratives, negative characters, or antagonists, often rival if not overshadow positive characters or protagonists. Shakespeare's villain-heroes are as, if not more, memorable than at least his tragic heroes. Iago puts Othello in the shade, Edmund's charisma in *King Lear* is undeniable, Macbeth dominates the play named after him, and part of Hamlet's appeal lies in the grey shades that his character possesses. Admittedly, none of these characters are peripheral. Macbeth and Hamlet, in particular, are the protagonists of the plays named after them.

When we come to the earliest surviving narrative poem in English, *Beowulf*, the three main antagonists are all peripheral in every sense of the term. Grendel seems formidable and invincible on his first appearance, and emerges from the periphery to virtually reign in Heorot for some twelve years as its *healðegn*, until defeated, expelled back into the periphery, after having been given his death-wound by Beowulf. The next two antagonists make Beowulf encounter them in their respective peripheral regions. Grendel's mother, while inexplicably described as a lesser terror on her first appearance, nearly eliminates the hero in her own peripheral lair, only divine dispensation intervening to save Beowulf. It is the same dispensation that prescribes death and defeat for our hero in the jaws of the dragon, again in its peripheral lair. Even the simultaneous destruction of the beast is made possible by the intervention of a second human being, Wiglaf. The periphery, in *Beowulf*, thus proves a worthy rival to the mainstream protagonist in all its three manifestations.

Notes

1. Text and translation from BEOWULF, diacritically-marked text and facing translation © 2002-12, Benjamin Slade <http://www.heorot.dk/beowulf-rede-text.html>, accessed October 27 2017
2. *Beowulf*, ed., with intro., notes, and prose translation, M. Swanton (Manchester University Press: Manchester, © 1978, rpt. 1982), 189, notes on ll. 139-40.

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Negotiating ‘Otherness’: Class, Sexuality and Harold Pinter’s *The Servant*

Siddhartha Biswas

The Servant is Harold Pinter’s first adapted screenplay. Primarily noted for its theme of the dominance-subservience conflict within the class system, this screenplay, as well as the film, remains one of the most famous by Pinter. *The Servant*, unlike most of his other adapted screenplays, follows a straightforward narration. This, in fact, effectively intensifies the thematic reversal. It is about a young unmarried man of financial independence employing a manservant and the latter using the weakness of his employer to reverse roles. Tony wants a servant who will do everything for him; his wish is fulfilled to an extent which is not only ironic, but also horrific. The theme had a different meaning in the 1940s when it was written, but by the time Pinter adapted it, the entire situation had changed. Class was always a significant issue, but class struggle became the primary point in conflict in the screenplay. The novella presents the diabolical, repulsive servant usurping the master’s position using all the vices that he could utilize. What the screenplay presents is almost a symbolic challenge from the ‘lower’ classes on ‘upper’ class standards such as power, privilege and fair-play. Continuing from *The Collection* this work too presents the Pinteresque concern with domestic power and how ambivalent sexuality can be turned into a weapon.

Joseph Losey, the director of the film, after seeing *A Night Out* felt that Pinter would be the right person to write the screenplay. Pinter almost cancelled the contract because Losey had some inputs regarding his screenplay. This, however, was settled amicably. Pinter’s adaptation of Maugham’s novella has little in common with the source as far as thematic concerns go and not unsurprisingly the author of the source novella hated it.

Pinter takes the original and completely remodels it to suit his purpose not only in structure, but in essence as well. The first major change that can be seen is in removal of the narratorial character – Richard Merton – probably thinking him to be a diluting factor in the intense psycho-social drama that Pinter wanted to present. As it is, the camera can function as the narrator (Asha 40). Usually the narratorial voice functions as commentator, clarifier – and these are completely alien in Pinterland. Richard’s sense of guilt in not being able to help Tony, and disgust in seeing a person of low-birth taking over, plays an important part in the novella. As Michael Billington had written:

Maugham's novel is undeniably powerful and dramatic: indeed, he himself turned it into a stage play in 1958 which he then revised in 1966 and was seen at Birmingham Rep in 1995. Yet it seems almost Victorian in its sensibility: it is filled with moral revulsion at the idea of a rich toff being dominated and corrupted by his proletarian servant. (151)

According to Billington, Maugham is writing a modern day parable with good angel Richard fighting the devil Barrett. Pinter finds all this unnecessary and distracting. And he omits much. The point achieved by the exclusion of Merton is the purging of the entire military background that Tony and Richard shared. In Maugham Tony and Richard are basically two faces of the author's self – the former what he might ultimately become, the latter what he ideally wanted to be. Barrett is merely the temptation personified in physique and behaviour. But in Pinter the whole design is different.

Maugham's novella has been called "lurid" by Michael Billington (150). The sensational elements have been modified by Pinter not only by the removal of the first person narrator, but also by a change in the setting. Maugham was writing about a time when the remnants of the pre-war genteel class was still surviving and was romantically yearning for the past (Bartlett xi). Along with the removal of the element of 'returning servicemen' Pinter is turning the whole tale contemporary – when power-politics, class-struggle, democracy, communism are all keywords in social discourse. This change introduces not only the change in the ideals and natures of the characters, but also the focus. While Maugham is concerned with class and corruption, with confirmed faith in the class system, Pinter's focus is almost entirely on corruption as revenge. Joseph Losey had commented,

All the characters are products and victims of the same thing – class. The same trap. It's a story about the trap – the house and the society in which they live. (Gale 47)

Maugham seems indecisive about the presentation of homo-eroticism which much of contemporary literature saw as a corrupting element. Maugham himself was gay, and in several scenes and dialogues there are hints. We see Tony and Richard walking arm in arm, somewhat drunk (Maugham 35). Even at the end Richard says, "I'll do all I can do to make you happy" (Maugham 75). As a matter of fact Neil Bartlett goes on to say that *The Servant* has an important place in "the history of gay writing" (xii). Bartlett sees the relationship between the three men in the novel – with Tony in the middle – as a triangle. This triangle is made all the more potent because of the undefined nature of the whole affair. Richard Merton's 'love' for Tony might be pure friendship, it might be something more. There are references to their past, as well as to the

present gestures and actions, which suggest physicality almost in excess. Their military background, in itself, implies the possibility of physical attraction. This is strengthened by the ‘cardboard’ nature of the female characters. Of course Maugham is not trying to be conventional, as Bartlett says,

At the epicenter of this sexually troubled world is a black hole; there is no question of Barrett being revealed as a homosexual, as villains conventionally should be. That would make him too simple (too simply dealt with) a problem. (xii)

Pinter presents ample suggestion to the fact. Of course, the Forties and the Sixties are quite different in their approaches to such socio-sexual issues.

Sexuality and power are common themes in Pinterland. And the screenplay is about power. And in this struggle sexuality is a major weapon. Pinter does not overtly focus on the homosexual element; it is established delicately. The phone-booth scene, where Barrett is seen calling Vera, is a major clue because Barrett responds negatively to a group of girls, the skirt of one of whom blows up in the wind (Pinter 26-28). Much later, in the Soho restaurant scene a conversation between lesbian couple is overheard (Pinter 32-33). Even the Chelsea pub scene, where the reconciliation is made, has all the elements of what Billington calls “a gay pick-up” (152). The fact that Barrett seems to have an affair with Vera might exist entirely to gratify her lust and to serve as a strategic move on the former’s part (Gale 62). She is accused of being a nymphomaniac, and in the book Richard Merton does find something to that effect (Maugham 69). Barrett intentionally points to Vera’s skirts to give Tony a push towards the physical degradation that he is aiming for. Here we have a man who would use simply anything to enmesh his victim. It seems that Barrett deliberately keeps Tony away from Sally, disrupting their private moments. In the novella these are not seen directly, but only reported. But in Pinter the whole becomes open for the audience to judge, not coloured by the points of view of Sally or Richard. The suggestion is that Barrett is starving Tony sexually. Barrett keeps pointing to Vera’s skirt, and then Vera is found naked in Tony’s bathroom (Pinter 43). Slowly the appealing presence of Vera becomes too much, and then Barrett makes his mastermove by keeping Vera alone in the house. When Tony finds her in her nightdress he falls prey to a scheme that was executed with perfection.

At that moment a tide of passion swept over him, and the room turned black before his eyes. It was as if he had given his sight to increase his sense of touch, for he felt intensely aware in all his limbs. He felt his arms encircle her waist and crush her body to him. He felt his lips on her skin searching for the moist softness of her mouth. Then with a spasm of joy he felt her tongue sliding

through his lips and her hands stroking his hair. They stumbled through the door to her little room. He remembered nothing more until he awoke feeling sick.

In Pinter the passion does not have the protective coating of language.

TONY

Your skirt's too short.

VERA

(looking down at her legs)

My what? That's how all the girls are wearing them. Well that's how they all wear them . . . Why? do you think it's too short?

He comes close to the table. She gestures to his face.

You hot?

A sudden savage embrace.

Oh that's nice that's nice oh that's nice.

Two figures seen distorted in shining saucepans. (Pinter 49)

The violence is the same. Barrett's *modus operandi* is to unearth the weaknesses from within and use them. This is the first step in alienating Tony and thereafter sexually frustrating him. This allows Tony to come out of the closet and to allow himself to explore within. Perhaps Barrett's design was to capture Tony with Vera, but the trajectory changes. The subtle progression towards homo-eroticism is ample proof that Barrett is stopping at nothing – to achieve his end he would play any role he deems necessary. Thus the theme of identity becomes one beyond the popularly perceived, primarily because the erotic or the self-realization in this case is not liberating, but destructive. Barrett, in fact, completely manipulates Tony's emotions in order to overwhelm and control Tony (Prentice 111-112).

The process of corruption and the figure of Barrett also undergo a sea change. Pinter is, as ever, very restrained. The change in sexuality is never allowed to be considered as a part of corruption. The servant figure is never as repulsive and therefore much more menacing. He is the outsider figure who slowly takes over the house. Pinter sticks to interior scenes and preserves the claustrophobia that pervaded the novella. It becomes almost a vicious parody of the pre-war innocent concept of the gentleman, and the gentleman's gentleman, as represented by the stories of Jeeves and Wooster. As a matter of fact when the takeover is complete, Pinter makes Barrett snarl:

I'll tell you what I am, I'll tell you what I am. I'm a gentleman's gentleman. And you're no bloody gentleman! (Pinter 74)

The equation is perfect. Since Tony is no gentleman, Barrett cannot be what he is supposed to be, he is only what the situation demands. Barrett pretends to shelter Tony from the world and in his weakness Tony allows him to do so; and thus even after knowing that he has been calculatingly seduced through Vera who has been sharing his bed with Barrett, Tony rejects all his friends (Gale 39). The fact that he himself practically sees them in bed is vital because the disgust it generates does not have in Tony the expected intensity and is easily defeated by the lack of comfort during Barrett's absence.

The modification in the figure of Barrett has come under scrutiny. In Maugham the narrator describes Barrett as,

He spoke in a prissy, affected voice, and the word 'sir' sounded like 'sahr'. He walked to a corner cupboard and began to take out decanters and bottles, which he placed carefully on a green tray. I watched him while Tony told me his news. He was over six foot, and I was surprised a tall man could move so delicately. His shoulders were narrow, and his hands were long and bony. One expected his mouth to match his features. But in the middle of his sallow face were stuck a pair of rosebud lips, which gave him the look of a dissolute cherub. His lids were heavy and looked oily, I remember. The contrast between his head and his body was disconcerting, as if a baroque angel were stuck on a gothic spire. His age might have been anything between thirty and fifty. I thought he was repellent. But Tony was obviously delighted with him. (Maugham 12-13)

Pinter does not describe Barrett at all. All he writes is "At the far side of the square Barrett appears" (Pinter 3) Pinter was asked if he had wanted to make Barrett a more agreeable character in lieu of the class-struggle theme. He said that such a task was not his concern, he said, "I am just concerned with what people are, with accuracy" (Burkman 131). This empathy towards characters has made Barrett much more of a human being than what we see in Maugham. In the screenplay we have a man of superior intelligence and skill who is victimized by his 'low' birth and has to serve a man of apparently lesser intellect, and definitely greater indolence. But Pinter never allows this consideration to overshadow or justify the nature of his actions.

Pinter's screenplay primarily focuses on the process of transformation. Tony becomes a man involved in a nebulous project to develop a jungle in Brazil; he is no longer the tired soldier studying Law. Perhaps Pinter wanted to present a person with

creative possibilities but faltering in pleasure. Steven H. Gale writes about Barrett,

Barrett appears infrequently in the novel and often only at second hand when he is mentioned in someone's gossip. He is seldom seen in person. As a matter of fact, he is not even introduced until nearly one-sixth of the way into the book, and when he is presented, it is clear from Tony's remark, "I've given up trying to control him," that the servant dominates his master easily from the beginning (Maugham, 16). There is no sense of conflict between the two men and no tracing of the breakdown of Tony's character. This is because of Maugham's conception of Barrett's nature; like John Keats's *Lamia*, Barrett, who is described as a snake, is fundamentally evil. Tony is "lazy, and he likes to be comfortable," according to the narrator, so Barrett's method is simple: "He's found out Tony's weakness, and he's playing on it" (20). (Gale 40)

There is nothing grotesque about Barrett in Pinter. He is a normal – almost pleasant superficially – lower-middle-class figure. He is prim and proper, hiding the agenda within. But as the screenplay progresses a lot of veneers are abandoned. The increase in their intimacy is the path towards the conversion. We have a series of scenes where they bond – for instance the candlelit dinner where they share memories of army-life. In a scene towards the middle, after Vera is discovered in Tony's bathroom, we see Barrett preparing to use the bathroom in concern (Pinter 45). This shows a perversion, a joy in breaking a taboo, which defines the character of the servant here. He is not merely a corruptor, but a parasite integrally intertwined with Tony. We actually see the process of Barrett becoming the master of Tony's life through his role of servant-wife-mistress (Bartlett xiii). The focus is on the degradation suffered by both men. Barrett changes into something he did not seem to be. But Barrett definitely is in control.

This Barrett is very different from the one who had entered Tony's service earlier. The changes in appearance and approach are marked clearly. His use of sex as an instrument seems to have affected him as well. Like all of Pinter's characters he is also trapped within his own agenda. He has taken over the mind, body and house of his erstwhile master, but it seems to have taken a toll on him too. He may be the most insidious outsider of all, but he is not immune to his own schemes. By starting the screenplay with Barrett the process of shifting the spotlight from Tony to his servant is initiated. The well groomed Barrett at the beginning is a striking contrast to the Barrett we see at the end. As a matter of fact one may say the principal character in the screenplay is Barrett and not Tony (Gale 46).

Maugham's novel can be seen as what Billington calls a "political fable about the effect of Clement Attlee's post-war socialism on the British class-system" (Billington 152-3). The references to rationing, black-markets do show glimpses of war-ravaged England, and Attlee's victory as well as policies were much disliked by most supporters of the Conservative Party and the Royal family. Maugham's attitude is not unclear. Tony is made to support the new political philosophy only under the influence of Barrett (Maugham 33). One may find a genuine tone of sympathy in Pinter's Tony saying, "Look, he may be a servant but he's still a human being!" (Pinter 26). Maugham was a friend of Churchill, and his dislike of the Labour Party is to be expected. Thus the figure of Barrett becomes a symbol of the Labour Party insidiously taking over power. But Pinter turns him into the outsider – thereby perhaps turning the whole class into the *other*. But his treatment is never biased.

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Beyond the Conceptual peripheries of Race: A Study of the 'Racial Others' in Wilkie Collins's Sensation Fiction

Anindita Bhaumik

The study of the peripheries is intrinsic to any literary and cultural experience. This paper attempts to investigate the treatment of people remaining beyond the social and cultural 'peripheries' of the nineteenth-century British fiction. In this respect, it proposes to analyse some fictional works of Wilkie Collins (1824–1889), the popular nineteenth-century novelist. Collins made a distinctive contribution to sensation fiction which played a dominant role in the fiction market of the 1860s. In Collins's fiction, socially marginalised people play pivotal roles; the main courses of his narratives are significantly determined by them. The paper concentrates, mainly, on the portrayal of the 'racial others' in Collins's works. It is interesting to find out the ways in which the author questions and subverts the accepted standards of his contemporary society. It shows, at the same time, how his representation of 'others' locates the complexities in constructing and maintaining the Victorian 'self'.

The Victorian concept of 'others' is connected to the rapid social, economic, political and intellectual changes which created a sense of novelty, excitement, competition, and most significantly, contradiction, uncertainty and instability. The concept of progress and reform in the nineteenth-century Britain led way to the 'crumbling away' of old values and customs. The romantic sensibilities of the preceding period were gradually giving way to a new social and economic juncture with newly advanced science, Industrial Revolution, colonising forces and a steady rise of capitalism. The frustrations and discontent of the working classes regarding poor economic conditions, difficult working conditions and lack of political power were reflected in the Chartist Movement. The movement attempted to initiate a radical change in the social order through parliamentary democracy. Political turmoil and consequent anxiety of political violence (not always realistic, though) pervaded the period. This anxiety sought, perhaps, the existence of an 'other' to define and establish the middle-class 'self'.

Thus, Victorian preoccupation with the 'others' can be interpreted as an attempt to recognise and assert the superiority of the dominant collective 'self'. In a sense, the term 'other' apparently denotes everything that the Victorians perceived as 'different' from themselves. Sean Purchase observes in *Key Concepts in Victorian Literature* that the concept of 'other' is "inseparable from Victorian anxieties about identity, race, and related problems such as class, gender and sexuality" (105). He notices a

feeling of general suspicion among the Victorians about the people beyond the British Isles, particularly those with darker complexions, different languages and cultures, different religions, and unfamiliar ways of living. The sense of the British 'self' may also be established against the Oriental and colonial 'others' who were defeated and ruled by the British in different colonies (106).

It is to be noted that in context of postcolonial and postmodern discourse, the meaning and significance of the term 'other' extend, widen and transcend the Victorian limits. Deriving from the concept of 'difference', postcolonial consciousness is against a discriminative hostility towards the 'others'. 'Difference' is now defined as a process which calls the native elements of the colonial experience as "an-other history and an-other culture" (Bhabha 98). Our time tends to uphold the necessity of understanding the whole by studying its diverse parts. We seem to be better prepared to accept different hierarchies of values and entertain diverse functions of culture rather than a unitary one. In this changed scenario, the concept of an 'other' also is expected to go through a series of substantial alterations and developments. The concern with Victorian 'otherness' is, however, relevant in spite of all these alterations as "everything has changed, and nothing has changed" between the Victorian era and the present day (Diamond 6). The word Victorian not only stands for a historical moment, but also a cultural transition. Though more than a century has passed, the sense of transition with its inherent uncertainties, conflicts and contradictions is still relevant not only in Britain but around the world.

The feeling of unrest in the nineteenth century was also accompanied by an anxiety of foreign invasion. James Buzard observes in the essay "Then on the Shore of the Wide World: The Victorian Nation and Its Others" that the British nineteenth century seemed to be "bracketed by powerful fears of invasion" (440). There was, however, no real threat from the foreign army after defeating Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815. Yet, the slow but steady decay of British global influence, the loss of overseas markets for British goods, the rise of other nations as economic and political powers (especially, Germany and the United States), and the increasing problems and unrest in the colonies— all diminished the British sense of complacency. The metaphor of 'invasion' can be explained as a factor evolved out of a desire for national oneness, which created the need to establish some "territorial and conceptual borders" (442). What remained outside the 'border' usually confronted coldness, disbelief and even refusal. This attitude supports the claim that "the process by which individuals or groups embrace the concept of the nation as the most meaningful context for self-definition necessarily involves temporarily marginalizing other categories that could also provide a sense of identity" (Poovey 55). Freud also provides us with a psychoanalytic explanation of the relation between the foreign and one's own nation, and the hostility against the outsiders in his *Civilisation and its Discontents*. In his

opinion, it is always possible “to bind together a considerable people in love, so long as there are other people left over to receive the manifestations of their aggressiveness” (305). This may explain why there was a tendency in the nineteenth century Britain to isolate and separate itself from other nations.

Wilkie Collins’s sensation novels offer a powerful critique of Victorian conception of race, and the contemporary anxieties associated with it. It must be noted that sensation novels which deal with complex plots of mystery, secret, crime and horror, had a peripheral status in the contemporary literary scenario. Its exploitative approach to controversial and shocking issues invited fierce critical attacks from the contemporary reviewers. For example, an article in the Dickens-edited weekly *All the Year Round* described the “unnatural” appetite for sensation as “a diseased craving, an unwholesome fancy”, “something novel and of significant degeneration” (Dickens 517). It has been regarded, almost from the very beginning, as a threat to the traditionally accepted social and moral standards. Despite its association with the so-called low literary tradition, sensation fiction was extremely popular to middle-class readers. Perhaps, this popularity of such novels made the critics apprehensive of the invasion of the ‘other’ on the middle-class ‘self’. In this respect, sensation fiction evidently transcended the boundaries between the classes and as a literary genre belonged to a slippery region between ‘high’ and ‘low’ literary traditions.

The presumed superiority of the Anglo-Saxons was a part of the contemporary British racial discourse. It was generally agreed in the mid-nineteenth century that the physical, intellectual and moral characters of human beings were determined by race, and that the ‘dark’ races are much inferior to the ‘white’ ones. Race was given a pseudo-scientific dimension that resulted in an attempt to create a hierarchy of races that placed the white, Caucasian or ‘Aryan’ race at its summit. It may be said that Victorian idea of race was constructed and strengthened by the motivated misreading of the newly developed biological sciences and discourses of anthropology. Interestingly, the nineteenth century England saw the immense popularity of a pseudo-science called Phrenology which linked the shape of human skull to a person’s character and racial identity. Even Thomas Carlyle, in his “Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question” (1849), represents the black ‘other’ as “ugly”, “idle”, “rebellious” and “foolish” (463-92).

The question of ‘race’ is related to the ideas of imperialism and colonisation, too. British imperialism gained official acknowledgement when Queen Victoria was announced as the Empress of India in 1876. The concept of imperialism, however, existed long before this official declaration. It had made its presence prevalent by several events of the 1850s and 60s, one of the most notable of which was the ‘Indian Mutiny’ of 1857. Pykett rightly observes that “the British way of life in the nineteenth

century was increasingly dependent on the Empire” as it was essential to the economic development of Britain (67). It created the necessity to justify the Empire and the supremacy of the British (more specifically, English) people and their way of life. The concept of ‘race’ played a vital role in this respect. Brantlinger mentions in *Victorian Literature and Postcolonial Studies* the tendency of many imperialist narratives to impose “character” and “virtue” on the “colonising heroes” because of their “racial superiority” (37). On the other hand, the conquered ones “lack character”, and they are described as ‘savages’ or ‘barbarians’ “because they are racially inferior and perhaps ‘unfit’ to survive” (37).

The formation of British nationhood involves marginalisation of ‘un-British’ others. Andrew Porter, in his introduction to the nineteenth-century volume of the *Oxford History of the British Empire* argues that at the local levels of imperial and colonial governance, the definition of races held significant potential “for justifying rule, generating unity, and for establishing practices of political and administrative exclusion” (22). This attitude was strengthened by the outbreak of Anti-British violence in the British colonies, like the Indian Mutiny (1857) and the Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica (1865). Thus, Victorian attitude to ‘race’ developed adjacently to the expansion of the empire.

In the novels of Collins the ideas of imperialism and colonisation are represented in a different way. In Collins’s *The Moonstone*, the ‘devilish’ Indian diamond itself is a threat to the complacent British family as well as to the socio-cultural hierarchy of Victorian England. This may be called an instance of ‘reverse colonisation’, by which the “primitive” people and cultural influences from colonised portions of the world start invading the “civilised” world. (Arata 623) Reverse colonisation becomes problematic and terrifying because it involves a reversal of roles. The exploitation of the “exploiter” signifies a counter attack at fantastic level, providing “an opportunity to atone for imperial sins, since reverse colonization is often represented as deserved punishment” (623). This process creates its nightmare products, for example, in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897). The three Indians in *The Moonstone*, with their keen intellect, dignified manners and mastery over the English language seem to be the incarnations of the process of ‘reverse colonisation’.

In Collins’s fictional works, one may recognise his responses to the subject of racial identity and the assumptions on which Victorian imperial ideals were based. For instance, *Antonina, or the Fall of Rome* (1850) which drew on Edward Gibbon’s account of the fall of ancient Rome by the invasion of the Goths foreshadows the possible decline of the oppressive British Empire. The novel makes repeated analogies between the imperial practices of the Romans and those of the British officers and employees of the East India Company who prospered on the wealth of the colony and

abused the indigenous women. Apart from the novels published in the 1860s, Collins's *Poor Miss Finch* (1872) also explores the idea of racial categories. Lucilla Finch, the protagonist of the novel initially feels extreme aversion to the dark-skinned people. However, Lucilla finally overcomes her prejudices and marries Oscar Dubourg whose skin-colour is permanently darkened as a side effect of his treatment for epilepsy.

Collins's attitude to contemporary ideas of race and empire is, perhaps, best expressed in *The Moonstone* (1868). The 'moonstone', an "unfathomable" diamond (64) disturbs the conventional and 'tranquil' life of the mid-nineteenth-century respectable English society with its problematic presence. The narrative begins with a Prologue which relates the history of the diamond, "a famous gem in the annals of India" (7) and its removal to England from Seringapatam by Colonel John Herncastle. Catherine Peters suggests in her introduction to *The Moonstone* that, the moonstone contains a warning against "the dangers of the complacent British certainty that there is only one way to view the world, and to live in it" (xix). This is evident from the speech of Gabriel Betteredge, an elderly English steward of Lady Verinder's house in *The Moonstone*:

. . . here was our quiet English house suddenly invaded by a devilish Indian Diamond—bringing after it a conspiracy of living rogues, set loose on us by the vengeance of a dead man. . . .
Who ever heard the like of it—in the nineteenth century, mind; in an age of progress, and in a country which rejoices in the blessings of the British constitution? (38)

Thus, the novel shows how the country house of the Verinders, enjoying a sense of 'progress' and 'blessings' of British constitution, is shockingly exposed and vulnerable to the horror of 'otherness'. Here the author introduces his readers to the representatives of other civilisations, other cultural experience and form of religious belief. In a sense, the moonstone becomes a symbol of India, the most precious possession of imperialist Britain. Perhaps, Britain's exploitation of its "jewel", India, is symbolised by John Herncastle's plunder of the diamond (Reed 287).

Collins presents the 'racial others' not as savages, but as educated gentlemen. They are able to manipulate the ruler's resources for their own benefit. For instance, their dexterous use of the English language helps them to interact with different English people in order to make their mission accomplished. They are concerned not with their exclusion from Western society, but with maintaining their own values and customs. They are ready to sacrifice their lives and status to a legitimate attempt to regain a sacred object that had been brutally and unethically seized from them. They prove to be dedicated religious believers rather than common thieves. The final scene of the book takes place in India, with the restoration of the jewel to its proper place. It

transfers the readers from the self-content English domesticity to the ‘mysterious’, foreign, dark realm of the colonial ‘other’. Significantly, the three Hindus are ostracised from their own community as they “crossed the sea” (*The Moonstone* 72) and came in contact with the English people. Their final marginality marks an alteration of perspectives. To the Hindus, the Englishmen, as the foreign and religious ‘other’ are untouchable and unacceptable. Everything changes when the ‘self’ is assessed from the point of view of the ‘other’. None can overlook the sentimental treatment of the three Indians at the end of the novel.

Wilkie Collins, in contrast to most of his contemporaries, never insists, as his character Gabriel Betteredge in *The Moonstone* does, that everything British was admirable, and everything foreign inferior. Rather, he appears to be “an apologist for empire” (Nayder 145). In the novel John Herncastle is satirically called “the Honourable John” (*The Moonstone* 36), which is a nickname for the East India Company. In a background of general racial repulsion and hatred towards the Indians after the so-called Mutiny, Collins humanises the ‘others’ who were commonly criminalised by his contemporaries. His portrayal of the three ‘foreign others’ interrogates the validity of Victorian racial and imperialist stereotypes.

Victorian racial ideology was undeniably connected to the anxieties about the purity of the race and “threat of cross racial contamination” (Purchase 112). This anxiety shows its most striking effect in the life of Ezra Jennings, the assistant of Mr. Candy, the medical man. Jennings is a person of mixed blood, born in a British colony to an English father and a foreign mother. Being a racial and cultural hybrid, Jennings is a ‘by-product’ of the empire. As patriarchy and imperialism are reinforcing categories, the discourse of empire included the masculine enterprise of conquering the wealth of the ‘colonial others’ including their women. For example, Brantlinger mentions Edmund Burke’s view on the ‘brutal violation’ of both Indian women and India by the employees of the East India Company during the Warren Hastings trial (69). The children born out of various interracial connections had been regarded as a ‘threat’ to the fallacious assumption of racial purity from the very beginning. In fact, the ‘problem’ with the ‘mixed race’ children may be explained in terms of their lack of “a clearly articulated and self-defined social identity” (Parker 3). To the nineteenth (and the twentieth) century thinkers, Parker says, “the emergence of ‘mixed race’ children was an ominous portent of the genetic deterioration of the nation, and indeed the human race itself” (3).

Jennings’s birth symbolises the transgression of the boundary between the coloniser and the colonised. This is manifested in his physical description, too. Jennings’s body incorporates both the characteristics of the ‘ancient’ (primitive) races of the East, and ‘newer’ (advanced) races of the West. The juxtaposition of black and white colours in his hair symbolises the violation of racial boundaries. The ‘border’ between the two is

blurred, defying ‘regularity’. Jennings’s ‘gypsy complexion’ and unconventional features, which are the signs of miscegenation, imply violation of ‘natural’ order.

Jennings’s identity comprises a blending of the English gentleman and “colonial Other” (Heller 258). Jennings informs Blake, “I was born and partly brought up, in one of our colonies. My father was an Englishman; but my mother – we are straying away from our subject” (*The Moonstone* 341). His deliberate pause after “my mother” may suggest a tension regarding his origins and his desire to hide the racial background. Interestingly, this marginal man called the British colonies as ‘our colonies’. This establishes Jennings’s desire to “identify not with his native mother but with white men—his father and Blake, to whom he is speaking” (Heller 259). This duality is repeatedly manifested in his portrayal. On the one hand, Ezra Jennings is the novel’s most scientific detective. Yet, on the other hand, Jennings is subject to some “terrible emotion” that is apparently unusual in such a methodical person (*The Moonstone* 347). Jennings is the only person of *The Moonstone*, who is able to consider the importance of apparently trivial details and, at the same time, transcend the boundaries of so-called rationality. This imaginative faculty enables Jennings to reconstruct the broken words uttered by the delirious Candy into a significant and meaningful confession. As rationality was considered to be one of the necessary features of the conventional English ‘self’, its pairing with irrationality indicates the blending of the ‘self’ and the ‘other’.

Jennings’s addiction to opium also pushes him to the margins of social respectability. The duality in Jennings’s character is again emphasised in his attempts to conform to the conventional social order despite his radical thinking. He plays the role of a physician who rejuvenates the family by curing its ills. At the same time, he strengthens the empire by providing the “gratifying ending” wherein the ‘problematic’ diamond is restored to its original place and “disruptive” Indians who have invaded the domestic space “are put back where they belong on Britain’s imperial map” (David 94). Yet Jennings, one of the chief contributors to the happy ending, never appears at the wedding of Franklin Blake and Rachel; he dies before he can enter their house as a ‘guest’. Death finally confirms his peripheral position, denying him the possibility of social acceptance.

Another example of a mixed-race ‘other’ is Ozias Midwinter in *Armada*. Ozias Midwinter (the real Allan Armadale) is the offspring of a black West Indian mother and white English father. By setting the Prelude in 1832, the year preceding the emancipation of the slaves in the British territories, Collins subtly hinted that Midwinter, the dark Armadale, is a “child of slavery” (Sutherland xx). Midwinter’s ‘otherness’ is unmistakably imprinted in his appearance: “His tawny complexion, his large bright brown eyes, his black mustachios and beard, gave him something of a foreign look. .

. . . His dusky hands were wiry and nervous, and were lividly discoloured in more places than one, by the scars of old wounds” (*Armadale* 60).

Midwinter’s ‘tawny’ complexion may remind one of the fratricidal Cain. His appearance causes a feeling of repulsion in Reverend Brock’s conventional mind, and his “healthy Anglo-Saxon flesh crept responsively at every casual movement of the usher’s supple brown fingers, and every passing distortion of the usher’s haggard yellow face” (64).

Midwinter’s peripheral state is highlighted again and again with the recurrent use of the adjectives like “strange” and “castaway” (64-65). As a child of a murderous father, he has always been despised and ill-treated by both his mother and his stepfather. However, Allan’s view of Midwinter is very significant. Allan sees in him “a man who was not cut out on the regular local pattern, and whose way in the world had the one great merit (in those parts) of being a way of his own” (67). In a place where ‘custom-bound’ sameness of look, manners, habit and thinking prevails, Midwinter is an unavoidable exception, with his unconventional mental strength, insight into life and a vast experience of the world. Just like Jennings, Midwinter’s keen intelligence is paired with a violent fit of passion suppressed in him. *Armadale* focuses on the contrast of fairness, race, class and personality to signify the bond between two men joined in a friendship in spite of all the differences.

Ozias Midwinter is more capable of the two male protagonists in *Armadale*. The novel marks his gradual acquisition of confidence and resolution. This is manifested in Midwinter’s renunciation of the so-called ‘genteel’ life for a profession of his own choice. His turn to professional authorship begins a new chapter of his life. Indeed, through Midwinter, Collins establishes the superior merit of a ‘racial other’.

Thus, we see in Collins’s novels two broad categories of people belonging to different race and creed: colonial ‘others’ and mixed-blood ‘others’. His treatment of these characters is striking in various ways. Collins’s portrayal of the Indians openly contradicts the nineteenth century attitude towards the so-called ‘uncivilised’ and ‘barbaric’ colonial ‘others’. His representation of the ‘mixed-race’ people questions the validity of the social prejudice against them. All of them surprise the common readers with their advanced knowledge, superior intellect and ability to overpower the people around them. They not only familiarise the readers with different cultural experiences and value systems beyond the traditionally accepted ones, but also contradict the conventional standards that marginalised them.

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Beckett's Incomplete Oeuvre: Textual Peripheries, Deferred Ends

Sambuddha Ghosh

It is usual, and quite relevant to approach any discussion on Beckett's fiction in the light of a late Modernist aesthetic. With special reference to most of his longer fiction, Beckett is, and continues to be seen in league with the whimsically erudite tradition of Joyce and the visually picturesque quality of Proust. My approach in this paper will be to highlight a relative neglect of Beckett's shorter prose when compared to his novels—*Watt*, *Murphy*, the *Trilogy* and *How It Is*. My intention will be to construct a genealogical design of the 'aesthetic of incompleteness', in which I will try to situate a few of Beckett's short pieces, especially those that can claim a textual alterity within his oeuvre. My primary texts here include three of the Fizzles— Fizzle 1, 2 and 8—and 'neither'. By trying to trace a link between this body of Beckett's shorter fiction as 'incomplete' and the postmodern thematics of perpetual ambivalence and deferral, I shall argue that Beckett's shorter pieces, by virtue of their 'peripheral' nature, act as 'supplements' to his entire oeuvre, forever forestalling finality; and by that same token, challenge the self-contained integrity of his oeuvre

In his introduction to *The Complete Short Prose*, S.E. Gontarski writes,

Beckett's stories have instead often been treated as anomalous or aberrant, a species so alien to the tradition of short fiction that critics are still struggling to assess not only what they mean—if indeed they "mean" at all—but what they are: stories or novels, prose or poetry, rejected fragments or completed tales.(1)

Gontarski's quote sums up the relative lack of attention to Beckett's short fictions, and the template of the "rejected piece" is significant here. For it is this same template that Beckett uses and reuses in an affirmative manner, and this feature is all too apparent in the sense of slighting and pejorative connotations they bear. "Imagination Dead Imagine" suggests an overdone circularity; "Ping" locates naming in inconsequential onomatopoeia, "Lessness" is but an imperfect translation of the 'original' French piece, "Sans" and so on. This same trope of the trashed piece is conjoined in Beckett with the self-deprecating humour of an "abjection", often of the lavatorial kind. Israel Horovitz's reminiscences of his conversations with Beckett offer a good illustration of this point. Horovitz recounts an exchange he once had with Jean-Paul

Delamotte over the naming of Beckett's *Foirades*, where Delamotte pointed out the meaning of the word as "disgusting", on being asked by the former what it exactly meant. Horovitz recounts a later-day exchange with Beckett on the meaning of the word, where Beckett illustrates the twin connotations of the word:

"Foirade: disgusting? Utter nonsense! One *foirade* is a lamentable failure . . . something one attempts that is destined to fail, but must be attempted, nonetheless, because it is unquestionably worth the effort . . . thus, a lamentable failure." . . . And Beckett added, with the very slightest of smiles, "Of course, *foirade* also means 'wet fart'!" (Horovitz, 'My Friend Samuel Beckett', n. pag.)

Beckett's English title to these short pieces—*Fizzles*—captures the stuttering gait in their construction, as they expend themselves to an untimely end. On the other hand, the self-deprecating nature of an act of flatulence has been equally maintained through it.

But the "failed start" template is not to be taken at face value, as they challenge the idea of a completion which they imperfectly sought to attempt. This wilful subversion on Beckett's part is very clear when he points towards the ambivalent nature of the attempt: "unquestionably worth the effort" (Horovitz) What form of wholeness then do the short pieces embody? Gontarski summarises the general critical discomfort at these pieces when he describes them, following Trevor, as "the distillation of an essence" (Gontarski xi.) , but also as "stories pared to fragments, first abandoned, then unabandoned and "completed" through the act of publication" (Gontarski xi.) The aesthetic of incompleteness depends for its successful execution on the abandonment of different forms of grouping. Beckett's abandonment of character through the generic device of the proper noun is significant in this regard. In a majority of the short pieces, such as "Assumption", "The Expelled", "neither", *Texts for Nothing* or *Fizzles*, Beckett scatters personal pronouns at random, often in chaotic and confusing ways. Consciousness emerges in its vivid volatility as the words proliferate themselves on the page, insinuating a nonchalant breaking down of the textual body. The disembodied Beckettian "voice" is all too familiar a device to the "posed" nature of textual integrity. Frank O' Connor notes that the shorter pieces record "something we do not often find in the novel—an intense awareness of human loneliness" (O'Connor xii). I am not sure if this quality which O'Connor attributes to the shorter works by Beckett may not be extended to the whole of his prose— long or short. Rather I am of the opinion that Beckett contracts experience into inner world of consciousness, a domain of absolute singularity.

To locate "human loneliness" in the short pieces then, we must add certain

important qualifications: first, the claustrophobic imprisonment within the boundaries of the shorter text, whose rigid boundaries are forever incapacitated to “accommodate[s] the mess” of human perception. Secondly, even as the subject recedes into or obviates himself within the single work, he resurfaces in the oeuvre indefinitely and infinitely, leading to the structure of the oeuvre itself as forever incomplete. In the meantime, what remains on the page becomes the buffer between the subject and the non-subject, forever the symbolic invocation of an acute, and to reuse Eliot’s phrase, a “wholly new start, and a different kind of failure” (Eliot, ‘East Coker’)

Nevertheless, the sharing of common textual spaces guarantees a makeshift formal completion that is unavoidable. Often, the fact that Beckett’s serial short pieces (*Fizzles*, *Texts for Nothing*) are joined through the means of a formal grouping from the author himself is taken as the index of a critical overlooking, which impels critics to look for signs, signature moves and repetitive linguistic devices, under the symbolic insignia of which these works may be read and interpreted. Carol Shloss’ reading of the *Fizzles* connects the individual pieces through their common “variations on a past image” (Shloss 1985) and yet, in spite of them, these insignias fall short of representing the oeuvre as a whole.

1.1. The Incomplete Oeuvre: “neither” and Textual Spillage

The general trajectory of movement in the short pieces is therefore, bipolar. On the one hand, the enunciator-subject can only articulate the sensory immediacy that is fleeting, capturing vainly sights and sounds that form and re-form before them. Bodies, dark, and trapped within (and without) the textual realisation of enclosed spaces, struggle for coherence and continuity that emulates the act of writing itself. On the other hand, through a retracing of the past of the “things” the “voices” observe, they delve into the depths of their own memory, ruined and imperfect. These tug-of-wars between two conflicting impulses form the essence of Molloy’s predicament:

For the particulars, if you are interested in particulars, there is no need to despair; you may scrabble on the right door, in the right way, in the end. It’s for the whole there seems to be no spell. *Perhaps there is no whole before you’re dead.* (35; italics mine).

Nicoletta Pireddu points out that for each of the details, arising from Molloy’s immediate memory that he is able to reconstruct, there are countless others which are reabsorbed into forgetfulness (Pireddu 303-13). Fragments of memory refuse to allow the subject any stable perception through which he might articulate and thereby master reality. Incoherence is carried on Molloy’s back as he meditates on the uphill task of narrating the story with coherence. Fragments of others’ stories, each in their own right, constantly threaten the act of narration “Oh the stories I could tell you if I were

easy”, writes Molloy, “[W]hat a rabble in my head, what a gallery of moribunds. Murphy, Watt, Yerck, Mercier and all the others.” (Beckett, *Molloy*, 188) . Here, one cannot attempt to dissociate enunciator from referent or even the addressee. The act of enunciating, as Hager points out, is the notion of “a self reflecting on itself as through a mirror”. Meaning is born precisely in between, through the rupture that effaces and elides narration. This idea is remarkably carried forward by Beckett, in visual terms, through “neither”. In the piece, the self articulates, immanently, the traces of its own auto-negation, although both the “self” and the “unself” are both rendered “impenetrable”. It is rather the shadow in between, that lurks and evokes meaning out a limited, fragile sense of temporality. And yet, this very “shadow” is fragmented to “inner” and “outer” ones:

“To and fro in shadow from inner and outershadow

From impenetrable self to impenetrable unself by way of neither.”

(Beckett, ‘neither’, 258)

It is the space in between the doors of the self and the unself that remain half-closed, or half-open, swaying in the wind that “manufactures” the wavering light of meaning and unmeaning. For once, this climactic moment is amplified, extended over an indefinite stretch and thereafter suspended into a halt. Just as the light fades in and out on the mouth at the beginning and end of *Not I*, this cryptic “neither” in between is heeded through “light unfading”. This is also the moment where the need for articulation absolutely expends itself and ineffable silence comes into being. This discreet moment, the temporal halting at work here is what I would like to consider, following Lyotard, as the “un(re)presentable” moment in history, that manifests itself as a “forgetting” of the immemorial and the unthought. (Lyotard, ‘Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?’, 1979, p. 6) Beckett’s scenes are depleted of all indications of wholeness, even as the “bodies” depicted in his mindscapes themselves assume a “supplementarity”, a residual quality of their own, functioning as traces pointing towards a forever absent wholeness. The idea of the narrative work that breaks off suddenly as a fragment, a jagged end, is thus central to the short pieces; but even here meaning is born at the precipices of the jagged end where one work “ends” and the other “begins”. But, the notion of a finality forever suspending itself is also central to them. *Endgame* begins with “Finished, it’s finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished”, forever extending the moment of finality into the “body” of the work. The last passage from *The Unnameable* is well-known and does not require quoting, but what is notable is that the novel is formally closed at “I’ll go on”, undermining the integrity of the “whole” work radically. Andrew Gibson writes, “the completed work flaunts its own paradoxically untidy incompleteness” (Gibson, *quod. in After Beckett*, 407) and Beckett’s narrators, with their propensity to “go on” would perhaps agree and follow suit. Russell

Smith investigates the different forms of such postponed endings as well as the textual importance accorded to the “putative ending”, as they constantly interrupt the course of Beckett’s narratives with their suspended trails, postponing the moment of an end throughout the text:

“In such texts, which become, in a sense, all ending, the conclusiveness of the final words is radically undermined: a definitive end cannot be reached precisely because ends are so continually rehearsed and unsuccessfully invoked” (Smith 417).

Each of the completed works in *The Complete Short Prose* thus anticipates a process of textual spillage, entering, re-entering and leaving other works at will. Now, the theme of the quest in Beckettian narrative is a common one and has been adequately dealt with by many commentators, notably Uhlmann, Gontarski and Porter Abbott. To this theme, Smith adds a second: “the individual theme of the quest or journey, and the cosmic theme of entropic decay, the sense of “something [...] taking its course” (Smith 2004). But even the quest narrative frustrates itself as Beckett’s narrators continue to wander off endlessly in a mode of “going on”, characterized by an unrest that appears inscrutable. These meanderings, goings-off, turns of phrases, challenge a teleology of narrative as progression, both within and without the individual work. The oeuvre, as a “whole” is thus rendered forever incomplete, unstable and therefore, infinite.

1.2. “Finality without End”: The *faux pas* of an Indefinite Modernity

In his book *Samuel Beckett and the End of Modernity*, Richard Begam explores five novels by Beckett—*Watt*, *Murphy*, *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*—aligning the textual notion of the “ending” to a critical juncture within modernity that becomes indefinite. In examining the structure of *Malone Dies*, Begam writes, “Every time the novel takes two steps forward, it takes one step back, and while it doggedly pursues its particular ‘ends’, it never decisively achieves them, since one of the things it wants to end is precisely the idea of ‘ends’”. (Begam, 126). But even so, in its prefiguration as a textual device so much in Beckett’s canon, the importance of an “end” cannot possibly be overestimated. The poststructuralist reading of Beckett’s works could as easily be extended to his position in the temporal “chain” of authors whose names are extensively used to unveil a transition from modernism to post-modernism—Joyce, Proust, Kafka or Gide. While Beckett incorporates strains from these predecessors, they become also impediments before him in his “last” act of “overthrowing” the modernist strain. Here Begam underlines the dangers of classifying Beckett as completely equipped to overhaul the category of the “modern”. His overcoming, far from being definitive, itself, parodies the epochal teleology of a dialectical progression that leads into an “end”: “Beckett uses these writers [...] as points of reference in his own evolving dialogue with the modernism he seeks to overcome. But that overcoming does not occur - at least not in any ultimate sense -

for the pentalogy ‘ends’, in effect, by not ending (“I can’t go on, I must go on”)
(Begam 1996)

It is ironic therefore, that in a paper dealing with the question of postmodernity, under the broad banner of a poststructuralist methodology, I should try to read Beckett in terms other than ‘teleological’. Yet, accepting the first internal inconsistency within the argument, insofar as we can read Beckett as simultaneously grafted in the modernist strain, Frederic Jameson’s idea of an ‘inverted millennialism’ comes to mind. Jameson pinpoints that the distinctive feature of the postmodern turn is a shying away from the “premonitions of a future” to the sense of an end, a finality that forever extends itself. (Jameson 1984, 1) The ‘radical break’ or *coupure* that characterizes and subsequently frees the postmodern age from the clutches of its aesthetic predecessor, modernism is traced back by Jameson to the end of the 1950s and early 1960s. This is in conjunction with Zygmunt Bauman’s claim on the dichotomy between the figure of the ‘uncertain’ modernist and the ‘certain’ postmodernist. The first influx of the uncertain in the modern is seen by him as ‘just one more problem’, waiting to be fulfilled with resolve, resources and more knowledge, a ‘temporary affliction’ at best:

Modernity could dismiss its own uncertainty as a temporary affliction. Each uncertainty came with the recipe for curing it, just one more problem, and problems were defined by their solutions...The passage from uncertainty to certainty, from ambivalence to transparency seemed to be a matter of time, of resolve, of resources, of knowledge. It is an entirely different matter to live with the postmodern awareness of uncertainty, of the escape from contingency being as contingent as the condition from which escape is sought. (Bauman 1991, 237)

And yet the notion of a postmodern ‘ambivalence’, of uncertainty-as-destiny, is precisely built into itself through the two-way operation of a contrary principle: the sense of an end, a certainty that prolongs forever the uncertain and builds into itself the rhetoric of both an anxiety and an angst. The ‘postmodern’ is therefore, that stage in the progress of modernity “when it is able to face up to the fact that the growth of knowledge expands the field of ignorance...and that...acquisition of knowledge cannot express itself in any other form than awareness of more ignorance.” (Bauman 1991, 237)

Bauman however finds the fact that ‘there are many stories that need to be told over and over again, each time losing something and adding something to the past versions’ liberating; the narrative voice in Beckett’s short prose sees it as exhaustion. An exhaustion, but also an act of endless repetition that cannot but only repeat itself indefinitely, without end. As Nicoletta Pireddu has pointed out with reference to the

Fizzles, the title of the last text points to “the dynamics of endless repetition that truncates the texts before they attain a logical conclusion or a potential revelation implies exactly an act of re-presentation deprived of presentation and of presence” (Pireddu n.pag.) This rhetoric of incompleteness, she argues, refutes the essence of a “positive teleology” that the French title of the last piece cannot escape. And yet, as these texts represent a textual stigma of ‘wholeness’ the oeuvre is marked by a sense of paradoxical movement in stillness. It is quite iconic that the title of Beckett’s last work should be “Stirrings Still” that in a phrase seems to summarise the general movement of his last works; a movement that originated in *Texts for Nothing* and forever seeks to consummate itself by the end.

1.3. The Circuitous Journey and the Ruins of Memory: *Fizzles* 1, 2, and 8

The first piece in the *Fizzles* substitutes the textual act of retelling stories with the geometric trajectory of a journey. But the exteriority of the geographical space along which the movement occurs is paradoxically delimited by the ‘prison garb’ of the ‘barehead’ traveler, the usual narrative subject copiously used and reused by Beckett. The repetitive to and fro movement manifests itself as the traveler’s ‘toils’ at the ‘great head’ through a pattern of mockery: “he is forth again, he’ll be back again” (*Fizzle* 1, 224). The initial discomfort of the ‘prison garb’ is now replaced by an apparent acquaintance with the wandering journey at hand, he does not grope in spite of the dark, and yet this is not to suggest that the traveler’s knowledge of the road to be scaled is flawless. For whatever he accomplishes is severely undercut by the sheer insubstantiality of his memory. At the beginning of the piece we learn: “To this vague prison garb, none of his memories answer, so far, but all are of heaviness, in this connection, of fullness and of thickness” (*Fizzle* 1, 224).

At every turn he takes, ‘Barehead’ strikes against the walls that cause him little wounds. Once again, the same technique of circularity is reinforced within the textual capturing of the journey: “the little wounds have time to close before being opened again”. These are almost acoustic signatures within the textual registers of the Beckettian sentence—still and (yet), slowly moving. And predictably, it is not long before that the traveler, while trying to continue the journey, meditates on the entirety of the journey already. This suggests that this is merely a temporal point in his endless meanderings that are circuitous, but not circular. For there are no conscious textual demarcations of circularity in the story, the precise nature of the trajectory is one following the motif of failure. Reading the textual movement through an aesthetic of incompleteness, we realize that the premonitions of the ‘end’ are too many, while actual ‘endings’ are too few. The maze along which the traveler undertakes his travels constitutes a deferral of the ‘end’, just as we had suggested at the beginning of the chapter:

There are places where the walls almost meet, then it is the shoulders take the shock. But instead of stopping short, and even turning back, saying to himself, This is the end of the road, nothing now but to return to that other terminus and start again, instead he attacks the narrow sideways and so finally squeezes through, to the great hurt of his chest and back. (Fizzle 1, 225)

This 'going on' however, should not suggest that the possibility of movement can anyway dispel the stasis achieved through the piece. It is the self-defeating stasis, the inertia of movement that characterizes the movement of the traveler. He makes no effort to "pierce the gloom" (224) and instead, the reader is constantly frustrated by the labyrinthine meanderings of 'Barehead', as instead of fulfilling readers' expectations of him turning to the left, he 'finally' turns right and vice versa. Finally, all of these bends and turns, these minor deviations, are rendered futile with respect to the road: they are 'almost' straight and linear. "It matters little in any case, so long as he is on the right road..." (226) His memories place him in another instance of a *mise en abyme* on the same road, but to take his words at face value would necessarily be fallacious. For 'Barehead' is already made a 'destitute of history' even before he begins; for he is exiled to a state of having always begun, signified by the space of the road he travels. "[T]hat first instance beyond which is nothing, when he was already old"(226) recalls a freezing in time where the historical reconstruction of memory is rendered impossible. Pireddu writes:

The act of writing and the performance of the characters in Beckett's texts are in the service of a mechanism of remembering which is at the same time a dis-membering. In *Fizzles*, memory cannot reestablish a peaceful continuity between past and present; no edifice of totality can be reconstructed from the fragments of their topology. (Pireddu n.pag.)

And yet, although the totality is never completely reached, I must confess that Pireddu's reading of the *Fizzles* as emblematic of an already "supplementary" quality in relation to the "body" of Beckett's works does not address the question of the 'being' of the narrator within the residua that he is placed in. The "failed start" template must be abandoned in order to accommodate instances where Beckett undertakes a textual deception of sorts, middling the works under the banner of 'false starts' that are left incomplete but can attenuate themselves with the same. It is not entirely through an act of communicating futility that this takes place however; it is rather a stasis, a 'refusal' rather than an inability to render the fullness of a well-constructed historiography that seems iconic in the *Fizzles*. This is accentuated in the pre-eminence

of the “silence again, broken only by the sounds of the body on the way” (226) which reigns over the fragility of the protagonist’s memory, which assumes the apparent incompetence to reconstruct, but the temporality of the narrative is rejected outright into the stillness of no-time, delimited by the circumlocutions of imperfect memory. If anything surfaces as “supplementary” in the first piece, it is contained in this key line which defines the nature of this dichotomy between memory as writing and silence as the vessel, the site of the inscription: “The little or nothing of note till the minima, these too unforgettable, on days of great recall, a sound of fall so muted by the distance, or for want of weight, or for lack of space between departure and arrival, that it was perhaps his fancy”(227)

The “days of great recall” is an enigmatic phrase within the ambit of this particular text, as well as the general body of the work. Stephen Hager reads this phrase as those moments in a temporal scheme when ‘Barehead’ is able reconstruct his beginning. (Hager 2010 This reading however, has several problems. For one, the “beginning” is merely one of those theoretical possibilities within meaning formation, as is the end, in this piece. If there was indeed “a fall” to be sounded, it is an incorporation of the mythic within ‘Barehead’s narration, of which he is only acquainted through traces of past habit. This projection of all that has gone by into an ever-present ‘now’ is carried forward in Fizzle 2 as the nameless narrator contemplates ‘resuming’ an inspection, of himself or of “Horn” (229). But as he speaks of the ‘now’, he is aware of this ‘now’ being “five or six years ago” (229). Next, he foregrounds the temporality of the narration as one based on duration, rather than a teleology that progresses from ‘beginning’ to ‘end’: “These allusions to now, to before and after, and all such yet to come, that we may feel ourselves in time” (229). In Fizzle 3 and 4, the narrator concedes of a “giving up” before birth and that “it is not possible otherwise” (232, 234). A “confusion of memory and lament” renders youth “impossible” (232). In Fizzle 5, the residual scenery of nature dilapidated is qualified by the adjective ‘old’, counterbalanced by a ‘beginning’ where it was ‘bright’ (236), but this ‘beginning’ is forever effaced as the visual scape is forever old, a “remainder of beldam nature” (237). Likewise in Fizzle 6, the narrator is incapacitated by a stubborn ephemerality that he cannot control. But this ephemerality is self-negated by a temporal freezing of time that brings out the ‘everpresent’ as the only possible remain that shall ever be. The earth, addressed in the first line is always, already ‘old’ (p. 238). It is “too late” now for the narrator, but when this ‘now’ is pitted against bygone ‘moments of life’, the narrator knew “it was too late” (238) even “then”. The final image is carried forward by two thrusts of “now” that enacts the sublimity of ‘a childhood sea’ in a fixed, long, narratorial gaze: “No but now, now, simply stay still, standing before a window, one hand on the wall, the other clutching your shirt, and see the sky, a long gaze, but no, gasps and spasms, a childhood sea, other skies, another body” (239).

It is no surprise then that Fizzle 7 should be titled “Still”. The adjective is repeated seven times in course of the first twenty one lines, suggesting the seeming incapacitation, the paralysis that records duration but not exactly, ‘movement’. The overall effect is however, dependent on this ‘play’ between stillness and movement, because to record duration is also to record motion. The gaze of the camera eye in this rapid succession of visual images is highlighted by the adding up of “detail by detail all over to add up finally to this whole” (241). The single piece itself becomes a metonym for this ‘adding up’, leading to the purported ‘whole’ of the body of work at hand that is the *Fizzles*. This adding up makes the ‘whole’ body to “‘tremble’ all over” (241), suggesting an ever-continuing sense of formation and becoming that finally is destined to remain ‘unfulfilled’. This, quite consequentially, enacts the ritual foreboding of the ‘end’ by Fizzle 8.

But within this strategy of ‘incompletion’ are also incorporated the motifs of a ‘spillage’, both from within and from without. Rubin Rabinovitz’s reading of the *Fizzles*, for example, deals with this carrying over of aspects from Beckett’s earlier fiction. Textual hints and allusions that perform the dramatic function of an ‘aside’ serve to reinforce this idea. For Rabinovitz, the wanderer in Fizzle 1 is the familiar wanderer in the Beckett canon, retrospectively comparable to Murphy. In fact, the comparison is explicitly made within the text: “Murphy had first-rate legs”. But at the same time, Murphy’s “first-rate legs” also hint at a deprivation of the same in the case of Molloy, who “speaks at length about the trouble he had with his legs” (Rabinovitz 1983). The inability of Beckett’s protagonists to travel in straight lines, choosing instead a zigzag, serpentine trajectory is also indicated in ‘Barehead’s’ motion. “And if I did not go in a rigorously straight line, with my system of going in a circle, at least I did not go in a circle, and that was something” says Molloy, in a roundabout apologia that helps us situate his tale. (*Molloy*, 115) Similarly, in *The Unnamable*, the protagonist says he has “advanced a good ten paces”, not in “a straight line [I] need hardly say, but in a sharp curve” (p. 302) The circuitous journey, along with its metaphorical aspect becomes the strongest link between the body of work that is the *Fizzles* and its predecessors (as well as successors) in the Beckett canon. But there are also other examples of textual spillage, not only from Beckett’s earlier fiction, but also from the general body of the quest narrative, linking this journey with the arduous travails of the knight-errant. In Fizzle 2, the visitor is named “Horn” one of the many visitors who visit Moran in *Molloy*, who, Rabinovitz claims, by lighting “electric torches... illuminate note-books, look at them, turn off their lights, and then speak” (Rabinovitz 1983, 309), just as in Fizzle 2, the “[I]ight silence, dark speech” (229) of Horn follows after he had switched off his electric torch and had started speaking. “Horn” connects this piece also to the body of medieval romance leading up to King Horn. The structure of the romance is strongly dependent on the “play of repetition and resemblance” as claimed

by Joanna Luft, in her analysis of *The Romance of the Rose*. These “resemblances and repetitions” frustrate any attempts to reduce the romance solely to its allegorical moorings, through a strategy of explicitly endorsing “difference”. (Luft 2011, 49) The romance of King Horn is also sustained by a formulaic structure of repetition that is characteristic of the romance narrative, which itself is derived from its predecessor in antiquity, the epic. King Horn’s journey to Ireland, and his service to King Thurston under a false name once again enacts his designation as a visitor in disguise. Similarly, “the ruinstrewn land” (232) of Fizzle 3 recounts the “scattered ruins same grey as the sand ash” (197) of “Lessness” and also to the white pasture “strewn with red placenta” in the spring in “Heard in the Dark I” (248). Rabinovitz divides the formal structure of the *Fizzles* into two halves, the former alluding to Beckett’s earlier works, while the latter to works published after 1965. Although I feel such a dualistic scheme, dividing Beckett’s performance of textual spillage cannot be finally reconciled in its entirety, there is no doubt that there is a recurrent strategy where the strict boundaries of one piece fail to “contain” the work that overflows its precipices in the form of a cornucopia, emanating from disembodied “voices”. Fizzle 3 has no punctuation in its concluding line, carrying itself over to Fizzle 4 in form of a continuum. The incompleteness of Fizzle 4: “...he won’t think any more, he’ll go on...” (235) recalls the familiar ‘ending’ of *The Unnameable* and also records the descent of the body of the work into interior monologues that flout conventional punctuation in its latter half. The “textual spillage” elucidated here refers to the refusal of the individual piece to remain content within its boundaries, overflowing into other such “pieces”. These “pieces”, in turn, overflow the bounds of the *Fizzles* as a ‘whole’, which belong to the body of work that can be designated as ‘Beckett’s short prose’, which themselves, in turn, overflow into the entire oeuvre of Beckett that is rendered ‘incomplete’. Here, Pireddu’s deconstructive mode of reading the *Fizzles* as embodying a ‘supplementarity’ in themselves, is perhaps the best possible reading that can be offered in determining the relationship of the individual pieces to the oeuvre as a whole. Pireddu reads the bare, ruined landscape of the *Fizzles* as emblematic of an already extant residual quality, insufficiently referencing the absent ‘whole’ that was forever absent. ‘Wholeness’ is pushed back, deferred into the liminal realm of the never-present, and always (partially) referenced through the “traces” or “ruins” of an imperfect memory. (Pireddu n.pag.) Here, I would like to add to her reading that this relation of ‘supplementarity’ may be extended, not only to the ‘whole’ of the *Fizzles* themselves, but, as proposed earlier, projected back onto the body of Beckett’s ‘short prose’ and his oeuvre that is forever incomplete. In a projection of their inherent textuality within the Beckettian oeuvre, the *Fizzles* reenact their fragmentary nature in a deferral of wholeness as an abstract metaphysical subjunctive in relation to the oeuvre itself through a *mise en abyme* that extends from the smaller to the larger ‘fragment’, otherwise called the ‘whole’:

The title of the collection, in this respect, anticipates the “supplementary” quality of the ruins and traces upon which memory inscribes its project of reconstruction. As in the text of the Freudian unconscious, the fragments that recur throughout Beckett’s texts are residual in themselves: far from functioning as synecdoches for a totality that asks to be retrieved...Being “always already” incomplete, these supplements cannot but compensate imperfectly for the lack of plenitude they decree. (Pireddu n.pag.)

Let us attempt to read Fizzle 2 with a view to reconcile it within this strategy. The narrator receives Horn at night, having “come to bear everything bar being seen”. Horn consults “his notes” (229) by the light of his electric torch, delving into an investigation of time that has already passed. But these references to the past in the story form a part of its tendency to anchor the nameless subject within the current of duration rather than time as marked by stations of activity that may be inspected. For one, the narrator claims that “[i]t was five or six years since anyone had seen me”, but hastens to add that “[t]hese allusions to now, to before and after, and all such yet to come, that we may feel ourselves in time” (229). He also thinks of resuming an “inspection” of himself, in his “mirrors and looking-glasses so long put away” (230). The act of resumption, of beginning yet over again, recalls the inability of Beckett’s protagonists to stop, even after they have nothing to “go on” with. But the textual hint that Horn may be no more than an extension of the narrator-subject is also clear at the operative phrase “mirrors and looking-glasses”. If these are forms of reflection, balanced by their counter-reflection in the mirror of the narrator’s self-identity, then Fizzle 2 re-enacts a disintegration of the coherent subject, looking out for the traces and fragments of subjective memory “scattered” across various spaces and times. One has only to look at the section where Horn “went away” (230), after having been urged on by the narrator to light his face up by the electric torch, to understand this fragmentation which does not end at its ending. The “close of the session” may, by “some prank of chance” coincide with the “final extinction” (230), yet Horn’s withdrawal is never finished. His “waning face” lingers on “unaccountably” and once again, becomes a trigger for the narrator “to get[ting] up again” (230). All apparent indications within Fizzle 2 thus, lead up to a paradoxical closure of sorts, and the narrator’s “last” journey is never his last, but the wearying out of the “last” to its last imaginable trace: “I thought I had made my last journey, the one I must now try once more to elucidate, that it may be a lesson the one from which it were better I had never returned. But the feeling gains on me that I must undertake another” (230). The final line again underlines a similar “dragging on”, with the narrator “still throwing the javelin” in his fortieth year (231).

Fizzle 8 is perhaps the only piece within the *Fizzles* which takes “the end” as its central concern. But the circuitous journey deferring the end is always re-invoked by means of a narrative trajectory that for the first time within the *Fizzles*, appear circular rather than aimlessly long-winded. There is the final aim of reaching the end that is paradoxically highlighted throughout the body of the work, through the use of the strategy of repetitions and permutations. Structurally thus, the last “fizzle” appears to be a restructuring of the aleatory mode of writing used in “Ping” and “Lessness”, but this piece is qualified also by an important difference. While the aleatory mode in Beckett completely erases the duration of a temporal flow into an irrevocable, and claustrophobic stillness, the *Fizzles* are still marked by a middle way, between absolute stasis and discernible movement. Hager notes that the “eerily vacuous landscape” of the text marks repetitions and permutations through its projections of a sameness (which though, is only a concealment of “differences over time”), while the “characters” display the movement within. (Hager 2010) The initial passages of the text however display the fragmented authorial gaze which fails to record the vast expanse of the landscape in its entirety at one go and therefore, is forced to narrate it in parts. Nevertheless, these “parts” often overlap, foregrounding a sameness that proceeds with the rhythmic progress of movement:

1.a) “For to end yet again skull alone in a dark place bent bowed on a board to begin” (243)

b) “For to end yet again skull alone in the dark the void no neck no face just the box last place of all in the dark the void” (243)

2.a) “Grey cloudless sky grey sand as far as eye can see long desert to begin” (243)

b) “Grey cloudless sky ocean of dust not a ripple mock confines verge upon verge hell air not a breath.”(243-244)

c) “Grey dust as far as eye can see beneath grey cloudless sky and there all at once or by degrees this whiteness to decipher.” (245)

These repetitive, and yet “different” evocations of “grey” help to communicate the vastness of the panoramic, dilapidated landscape which elude the limited singularity of the individual wanderer’s gaze. They record an all-encompassing greyness, tinged with a likewise “unbearable” bleaching into white, twice used to describe the figure(s) of “the expelled”. The “ruinstrewn land (232)” of Fizzle 3 resurfaces, as does the “remainder of beldam nature” of Fizzle 5 (237). The entirety of the text uses, reuses and almost abuses the (re)iteration of figures, landscapes and visual images as fragments. In the two examples from the first set, the “skull alone” is in a dark place, trying to “begin”, and then again, the separation of the skull from the body is recounted

from two discrete points of view. The “skull alone” already supplements the “no neck no face just the box” of the rest of the body, so that this compound line verbally recounts the body as a “whole”, but only in “fragments”. But the endless deferral of ‘wholeness’ is carried to perpetuity in the following section: “Place of remains where once used to gleam in the dark on and off used to glimmer a remain.”(244)

If the “now” of narration presents a “remain”, the passage of enunciatory time backwards can only guarantee a further “remain”. This is the important textual hint in the light of which we may read the next two section(s):

3.a) “First change of all in the end a fragment comes away and falls. With slow fall for so dense a body it lights like cork on water and scarce breaks the surface.” (245)

b) “First change of all a fragment comes away from mother ruin and with slow fall scarce stirs the dust.” (245)

These two sections set forth the perpetual deferral of the whole as already shown before. The “mother ruin” may be read as reflexively referring back from the ‘incomplete’ *Fizzles* and engendering a yet ‘incomplete’ Fizzle. The same technique recurs with reference to descriptions of the figure(s) of “the expelled” in the story. For one, this figure may be taken as (yet) another example of a textual spillage referring back to the protagonist of the Beckettian story with the same name. But he is described always within the story as “a part” of ruins that themselves are “fragmented”. For example, in the first textual instance of his surfacing, the expelled stands “stark erect amidst the ruins”. The two “white dwarfs” stand out amidst the “grey”, they are indistinguishable from each other, carrying in themselves a “speck of whiteness” (243-244) which seems a reiteration of the whiteness of images used in the earlier pieces, “Imagination Dead Imagine”, “All Strange Away” and “Ping”. Their skulls, “bone white” are part of the ‘other’ skulls that prefigure within the text. In a later example, the expelled “falls headlong” amidst the ruins and the “eagle-eye” of discernment that records the scape, sees him “mingled with the ruins”, themselves grey (245). The indeterminate space that re-emerges in the subsequent play between “greyness” and “whiteness” in the piece therefore becomes worthy of note. The dwarfs, set against the mottled background of the “grey ruins”, dissolve (and likewise re-emerge) from within itself, deciphered “by degrees”. With reference to the short prose of Beckett, this is significant because Fizzle 8, standing at the precipice of the *Fizzles*, stubbornly refuses to “end”. Each of the references to “end” in the piece point to new “goings on” that never terminate once and for all, even as a “fall” ensures no possibility of a future “rise again”. Thus, a “dreg of life” always persists, endlessly emerging as supplements from the “mother ruin” (245).

The operative phrase in this ‘last’ Fizzle is “the dung litter of laughable memory”

(244) which points to its status as excreta, only capable of giving birth to a *disjecta membra* of sporadic, scattered fragments of textual enunciation. This act, as has been already shown, foregrounds an interminable ‘present’ and the always imminent doom of attempting to recreate a past. Pireddu reads this technique of narration as one which becomes the logical progression of the mind which foments up the Romantic aesthetic of incompleteness, “struggling against a “prostrating experience” of death as certainty where any claims to its “power and integrity... is metonymically translated into its material container, which acts as a *memento mori*” (Pireddu 1992) Against the forces of oblivion signaled by death, Pireddu claims “the perishable relic” recounts, through its failure, its paradoxical success at (imperfectly) representing ‘the unrepresentable’, following Lyotard’s notion of the postmodern sublime.

Now, let us look at the ‘end’ of Fizzle 8 where the first images of the ‘sepulchral skull’, the litter, the ‘dwarfs’, and the ruins recur, recalling the ‘final’ futility of ends. This recounting of the very first phrases (“For to end yet again”/ “...for in the end for to end yet again” (p. 246) makes the text a reflexive structuration par excellence, forever locking the text within itself. However, the key line in this section is: “And dream of a way in space with neither here nor there where all the footsteps ever fell can never fare nearer to anywhere not from anywhere further away?” (246). This equivocation is the blight of trying to find that delicate space in-between the word and its negation, the vacuous space of the page on which it is inscribed. It is the play within “neither here nor there” which leads us back to the indeterminacy of “neither”, discussed at the beginning of this chapter. I would like to argue, as a progression from an analysis of Beckett’s “incomplete oeuvre”, that this equivocatory zone between presence and the “naught” forms the structural model to locate “meaning in absentia” across the oeuvre of Beckett where we may finally ground his brief courting of the “aleatory” in writing.

3.4. Meaning in Absentia and the Radical Exhaustion of Language

The almost too-delicate and fragile interim space of becoming that is opened up by Beckett’s narrations are exercises in a form of meaning-formation akin to the ‘to and fro’ movement in “neither” between “impenetrable self” and “impenetrable unself”. Here, one envisions a strange affinity between two discrete textual orders of meaning formation, or more precisely, “reading”. We have seen how, in the aesthetic of incompleteness, the oeuvre is left forever ruptured, in search of a paradoxical fulfillment. If the oeuvre itself performs the textual function of a “supplement” (“the self”), then the main “body” of the author’s work “supplements” a (more) precocious, but intimidating absence (“the unself”) within the literary canon of which the said author may be supposed to occupy a place. Here, one encounters familiar textual labels such as “the death of the author” and the “birth of the reader” as the (newer) forms of

precession and control, 'authorising' discourses, acting as ineffable centres of meaning and articulation. For theory has so dominated the textual precincts of our "reading" that we cannot but already begin to predict a scandalisation of this very abdication of the author-position as arbiter and guarantor of discourses. Foucault, writing back to the beginning of Barthes' seminal essay "The Death of the Author", for example, quotes a line from Beckett:

"What does it matter who is speaking, someone said, what does it matter who's speaking" to respond to the problematic of writing and authorship in Barthes' discourse. (Foucault 101) This inaugurates a binary between two textual positions—the work with the author and the work without. But reading from the point of view of a theorist on Beckett, whose unfortunate task is to (re)locate aspects of Beckett's oeuvre to dominant textual 'methodologies' of reading, one observes that the authorial gaze in Beckett, especially after taking a turn along the axis of the trilogy, is poised in between these two opposites, indifferently glancing at "self" (authorial mediation) and "unself" (the lack of it). Here the function of the "naught" position is instrumental in formulating a theory of what the (Beckett's) work "means". In Beckett's canon, the "absence" of the author is once again, inflected by his aesthetics of "failure", where the author is marked in his being precisely through his incapability to become anything else, so that his uncontrollable desire to 'go on' finally reflects a failure. As shown in the *Fizzles*, this "failure" is the indeterminate position of having "failed better", as Beckett writes in *Worstward Ho* (7). The absence of that seemingly (better) alternative, of having to say "something" rather than nothing marks his work at large. The absence of the "better author" then, becomes the blight of the present one. This initiates an effacement not only in subjectivity as described above, but in a disavowal of the "present" in the oeuvre, in favour of a "future" towards which an author is exiled to strive endlessly on. But it is precisely this disavowal, this absence, which paradoxically constitutes the oeuvre.

If every experience of literary composition can be regarded as a foregrounding of meaning in absentia, the selection of signifiers in chains of literary signification might well as be random. Yet what is absent is also present *via negativa*. The pinning down of meaning to stable signifiers limits the 'play' of literary discourse. The absence of meaning can be regarded as a supplement in Derridean terms, which would come allegedly secondary to; to what is more "original" and "natural". But the act of supplementarity itself is an indefinite process because the supplement "is a plenitude replenishing another plenitude", within and without the whole that it supplements. The scope of the "whole" is infinity in the realm of meaning, but the very presence of the supplement points to a lack within the whole. These works therefore already become "repositories of a meaning never fully present" (Derrida, 'Freud and the Scene of Writing', 266). Here, the incomplete work marks absence and mediates

between presence and nothingness and creates a third space where the writer comes “outside” of himself and takes on a liminal being that cannot ‘be’ in its fullness, neither can terminate speaking—an experience of non-identity and difference-in-itself.

Curt G. Willtis calls this “a literature of ontological exile” where the “I-ness” of the narrator is distinctly different from the subjectivity of the author. Willtis analyses the famous beginning of *The Unnameable*—“Where now? Who now? When now? Unquestioning. I, say I. Unbelieving” as one which reveals the circular futility of all phenomenological enquiry, both of Heidegger and that of Dasein, to become a work where there is:

...an unrelenting assault on words, on signification, in a meticulously wrought movement of desultory purposelessness, characterized by the paradoxical play of signifiers voiding themselves of meaning, already always on the way to nothing, but always by way of something, forever condemned to step back inside the circle of logocentrism in stepping outside it. (Willtis 261-62)

Here the incomplete oeuvre foregrounds “pure writing” in the space opened up by literature, where the “end” becomes the never-ending one. The third space is born where one piece “ends” and the other cannot yet “begin”, or between the word and the next, merely as imperfect “containers” of meaning, in and of themselves, where the writer himself becomes a non-entity encountering the limit of fiction and has nothing to say, even as it cannot stop. This movement of Beckett’s narrators oscillates between a parallel fear and attraction of the “end” which prefigures in *The Unnameable* notably. The word and its “end” become the path to a portentous descent into the abyss of silence. In Blanchovian terms, it is also the perpetual fear of the “end” of literature, the possibility of silence which is a negation of another negation—that of “my consciousness *without* me—the “no being” which the author has already attained through writing:

...all words, there is nothing else, you must go on, that’s all I know, you must go on, that’s all I know, they’re going to stop, I know that well, I can feel it, they’re going to abandon me, it will be the silence, for a moment, a good few moments” (Beckett, *The Unnamable*, 399)

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Architects of Their Own Peripherality: Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim* and its Hindi Film Adaptations

Abhirup Mascharak

I

In her essay ‘*The Accidental Tourist on Page and on Screen: Interrogating Normative Theories about Film Adaptation*’, Karen Kline identifies four chief paradigms under which cinematic adaptations of literary works can be placed. Of these, the Translation and Pluralist paradigms, she says, value similarities rather than differences between the film and the literary work it is based on. In contrast, the Transformation paradigm, Kline states, operates under the assumption that literature and cinema are “separate, autonomous arts, constituted by different sign systems”, and that “finding equivalences between the two systems is not a priority, and, indeed, may not be possible.”(79) Instead, the approach in this paradigm is to treat the literary work as “raw material” which the adaptation “alters significantly, so that the film becomes an artistic work in its own right.”(80) Finally, the Materialist paradigm, according to Kline, eschews considerations of fidelity or differences almost completely, focusing instead on the social, cultural and economic conditions of the period during which the film adaptation was made, and on how these factors influenced the film. Even if the film is based on a pre-existing source, what matters in the Materialist paradigm are the circumstances under which the film came into being, rather than how it fares in comparison to the book.

For this essay, I intend to study two Hindi film adaptations of Joseph Conrad’s *Lord Jim*, concentrating on the extent to which they replicate on screen the isolation and peripherality that is central to Conrad’s oeuvre. I wish to analyze these films, Yash Chopra’s *Kaala Patthar* (1979) and Vishram Sawant’s *Risk* (2007), by using the Transformation and Materialist paradigms described above, to show how the former film, despite apparently having more in common with Conrad’s novel, is hardly a faithful adaptation and treats the book as no more than “raw material”, while the latter film, at first glance so different from *Lord Jim*, can be described as more Conradian, thereby demonstrating, in its own way, a faithfulness to the book and its theme of peripherality. Before that, though, it is essential that we look at how Conrad constructs peripherality in his works, including *Lord Jim*, for the peripherality he wrote about is one that is attributable not to birth, but to actions. In the next section, I elaborate upon the distinctive brand of peripherality in Conrad’s fiction before proceeding to the discussion about the aforementioned films.

II

In discussing the possible meaning of the phrase “one of us”, which Marlow, the narrator in *Lord Jim*, repeatedly uses to describe the titular character, G.G. Harpham says:

The simple but luminous phrase “one of us”...is cryptic in the extreme. Who is this “us”? Marlow never explains himself, so we have to guess. Is Jim being identified as one of a group of Englishmen, seamen, flawed people trying to do right in an imperfect world, people with guilty consciences, people who disappoint themselves, men of honor who are out of the common run, romantics, white men— all of which are possibilities at one point or another? Or is he simply being described as one of those who, like the angels, “know good and evil”— in other words, a human being after the Fall, as in the Genesis text Marlow appropriates? (qtd. in Ruppel 56)

Harpham goes on to elucidate on the meaning of the phrase, but for the purposes of this essay, I am interested not so much in what the phrase means, but in trying to understand if any of the possible meanings can denote a position of peripherality for Jim. In this context, some of the possible meanings that Harpham states can be discounted right away; being English and/or white, as Jim is, definitely does not make him peripheral in the early twentieth century (the period the book was written and set in), a period when the English and other European colonial powers reigned supreme. Nor did being a seaman in that era necessarily indicate peripherality, for the merchant navy personnel like Jim were very much part of the colonial enterprise, and hence were in positions of authority, at least vis-à-vis the non-white, non-naval people, such as the Muslim pilgrims on the ship *Patna*: “the five whites on board lived amidships”, we learn, “isolated from the human cargo.”(n.pag.) One should note not only the segregation between the five whites and the non-white Muslims, but also the use of the term “cargo” to describe the latter, and the dehumanizing connotations of the term. If Jim is one of the “men of honor who are out of the common run”, then that is a position of distinction, not peripherality (and since Jim’s abandonment of *Patna* leads to his dishonour, applying this phrase to him is hardly appropriate anyway). A degree of romanticism lay behind the colonial enterprise itself, for the notions of “civilizing” others and performing incredible feats in the name of the queen, God, and country had an undeniable romantic appeal. The daydreams Jim has about himself include scenes where he “confronted savages on tropical shores” and “quelled mutinies on the high seas” (n.pag), and the element of subjugation in these daydreams is distinctly colonial, and bespeaks the power Jim has as a white person and a future naval officer, for it is largely because of this ethnicity, which in turn makes it possible for him to aspire to the said profession, that he can dream about confronting and quelling other

people from different parts of the world. Of all the possible meanings that Harpham suggests for the phrase “one of us”, then, being English, white, a man of honour, a seaman, or a romantic does not make Jim a peripheral figure at all.

The other possibilities mentioned by Harpham are more relevant as far as the purpose of this essay is concerned. Jim is definitely a “flawed” person, and in this he is similar to most of Conrad’s protagonists, who each have a notable fault that contributes to his misery. This fault may be greed, such as Almayer’s obsession with locating a gold mine in *Almayer’s Folly*. It may be ideological investment in the dubious project of colonialism, visible in Mr. Kurtz’s desire for “humanizing, improving, instructing” (*Heart of Darkness*, n.pag.) besides guaranteeing good trade for the Belgian company he is employed by in *Heart of Darkness*. It may be vanity, which, in the case of the titular character of *Nostromo* is only “half appeased” (n.pag.) when he successfully guards the silver entrusted to him against enemy forces but is unable to deliver it to its destined location. This partially unsuccessful endeavour, together with his feeling that he has not received enough praise for his feats in subsequent military operations and that those rich folk who praise him do so only to use him for their own ends, hurts his ego considerably. This proves right both his mother-figure Teresa, who says he is greedy for “praise from strangers” (n.pag.), and his companion Decoud, who opines that what Nostromo cares most about is to be “well spoken of.” (n.pag.) It may be selfishness, which makes Razumov in *Under Western Eyes* betray Victor Haldin when the latter comes to him for refuge and aid after assassinating a despotic Russian minister, and Razumov, who is accustomed to an aloof and uneventful life and seeks employment with the government, gives Haldin up to the police to avoid trouble. In Jim’s case, the flaw that leads to his undoing is naiveté. Having read “light literature” (*Lord Jim*, n.pag.) about seafaring, he fantasizes about leading a life as full of daring deeds as the heroes in those books. As Kenneth B. Newell puts it, Jim

imagines himself to be as sure in the knowledge of himself in future maritime dangers as he is presently in the safety of his father’s parsonage, but the safe parsonage and the “sea-life of light literature” are deceptive. They do not show him the true tenets of the universe: changeable, unstable, unpredictable. Instead, aided by Jim’s vivid and romantic imagination, they foster the illusion in him that he has power over his life, that he is consciously self-determining, that he can do what he wills to do.(1)

These flaws are what ultimately cause Conrad’s characters to become lonely, isolated individuals, pushed to the fringes of the society, shorn of the power and status they may otherwise have gained. Almayer’s life is so consumed by the quest for gold that he becomes incapable of maintaining any relationships, and ends up a forlorn opium addict, abandoned by all, including his wife and daughter. Kurtz, as he goes into the hinterlands of Congo, finds himself so free of any control and supervision that he

soon turns into a tyrannical demigod among the natives, and ultimately dies of tropical diseases, away from his fiancée, despised by the very company he worked for, physically a shell of his former self, and intellectually an even bigger wreck, his idealistic pronouncements having given way to ramblings about “exterminat[ing] all the brutes” and muttering on “the horror” he has seen, done and become. Nostromo’s vain bitterness at not getting as much fame as he desires leads to his corruption as he hides the silver he was supposed to protect, steadily steals from it to enrich himself, while also growing fearful about being caught, and finally dies a rather inglorious death, gunned down by a well-wisher who mistakes him for a thief (which, as a matter of fact, is what he had become). Razumov, who had been used to a life of solitude, is beset with a far more trying and enervating sort of loneliness following his betrayal of Haldin—the suspicious authorities force him to infiltrate a group of revolutionaries staying in Geneva, and as he spies on them, Razumov, as Bruce Johnson correctly notes, is “morally isolated” (147), able to identify neither with the autocratic government he is working for nor with the revolutionaries, whom Conrad unflatteringly portrays as a deluded, unscrupulous, violent lot. This moral isolation, coupled with remorse, compels Razumov to confess his treachery. Ruthlessly beaten and crippled by the revolutionaries, he spends the rest of his life in obscurity in the countryside.

Similarly, Jim, in a fit of panic, abandons *Patna* and the pilgrims on it, thinking that the ship is sinking, and for this, his naval certificate is revoked, he has to undergo a humiliating trial, and becomes a pariah. In other words, his life turns out as differently from that of the heroes in his books as possible, and having thus fallen in his own eyes and those of others, Jim withdraws into a shell, ruminating about his mistake and wishing fervently for one more opportunity to prove his mettle. Conrad offers the readers constant descriptions and reminders of the lonely, detached life Jim has to lead after the *Patna* incident. During his trial, Jim muses that “for days, for many days, he had spoken to no one, but had held silent, incoherent, and endless converse with himself, like a prisoner alone in his cell.”(n.pag.) Later, speaking to Marlow about the decision he had arrived at about appearing for the trial, Jim says, “The proper thing was to face it out—alone for myself—wait for another chance—find out...”(n.pag.) Marlow, musing about Jim, feels that there seems to be no place on this earth where the latter may be able to “withdraw—be alone with his loneliness”,(n.pag.) and afterwards describes him as standing “on the brink of a vast obscurity, like a lonely figure by the shore of a sombre and hopeless ocean.”(n.pag.) During the second phase of Jim’s life in Patusan, too, words like “alone” and “isolation” continue to be used with reference to him. In chapter twenty-two, for instance, Marlow, looking at Jim, feels, “Nothing could have been more prosaic and more unsafe, more extravagantly casual, more lonely.”(n.pag.)

The loneliness Conrad so insistently describes is what makes Jim a forlorn, isolated and peripheral figure, and this peripherality is, in keeping with other Conrad protagonists,

largely his own doing. Fanciful ideas about what constitutes heroism had rendered him incapable of handling real-life crises, leading to his regrettable desertion of *Patna*, and the resultant disrepute is what cuts him off from the human society almost completely, not only because others now look down on him, but also because Jim himself cannot get over his inability to have become a hero when the occasion for it had presented itself. If, previously, he had daydreamed about becoming a hero like those in the “light literature”, those dreams, the regret that he could not fulfill those dreams when *Patna* was in peril, and the desire for a second opportunity are the only things that occupy his thoughts now. These preoccupations make him all but incapable of sustaining a relationship even with those few who view him with sympathy, even love. This is what makes his isolation complete. Richard Ruppel elaborates on this when, while discussing the undercurrent of homoeroticism in *Lord Jim*, he says that though Jim is desired by both men and women, he “seems scarcely aware of this admiration”, and that he “desert[s] Marlow and each of these other characters, even Jewel, with little awareness of or interest in the effect he has had on them or the grief he causes”, because he is “incapable of truly loving anyone except a phantom: the opportunity that stays veiled, like an Eastern bride, at his side.”(55-56) The only ‘romance’ Jim can have is with this opportunity to be a hero, to overcome the dishonour he is plagued by, and he can see the face of this “bride” only when he willingly takes a bullet as a penance for his second (and as we shall see, more terrible) misjudgment in Patusan. A life of such consummate loneliness that the person concerned can find companionship in death alone, and that too with an abstract ideal rather than a person, is a life of peripherality all right.

On the basis of the texts analyzed thus far, a legitimate conclusion to reach is that Conrad’s books often portray peripherality of an unusual variety. His protagonists suffer peripherality not because of the factors they are born into—such as their race, religion or sexual orientation—but because of their own fatal obsessions and ill-judged actions. To put it more precisely, Conrad’s protagonists are architects of their own peripherality. The factor that makes Conrad’s brand of peripherality all the more unnerving is that once a character falls into it, there seems to be no way for him to climb out of it. It is not that his protagonists do not try to make amends for their mistakes. It takes courage to confess, as Razumov does, one’s treacherous deeds. Kurtz, when he mutters “The horror! The horror!” seems to have attained self-knowledge about the maniacal violence he had unleashed, as part of the Belgian colonial rule, on the people of Congo. Jim definitely tries, and initially even succeeds, in distinguishing himself at Patusan after the debacle of the *Patna* incident; prior to that, he also appears for the trial, which none of the other officers of *Patna* do. These gestures, though, do not bring these characters any comfort or redemption. Instead, Razumov’s confession only brings him grievous physical injuries and a life of continued loneliness, while Kurtz gets no opportunity to use his self-knowledge to better himself in any way, for he dies almost immediately after having realized the enormity of his

misdeeds. As for Jim, the early successes at Patusan, such as his triumph over the bandit Sherif Ali, can only temporarily occlude his past, which comes back to haunt him when the pirate Gentleman Brown arrives at Patusan. Brown does not know about Jim's desertion of *Patna*, but seeing Jim, a white man like himself, in a non-western region such as Patusan stirs Brown's suspicions, and he taps into Jim's insecurity and guilt over *Patna* when he says:

Have we met to tell each other the story of our lives? Suppose you begin. No? Well, I am sure I don't want to hear. Keep it to yourself. I know it is no better than mine... I am here because I was afraid once in my life. Want to know what of? Of a prison. That scares me, and you may know it—if it's any good to you. I won't ask you what scared you into this infernal hole, where you seem to have found pretty pickings.(n.pag.)

Jim feels uneasy at the "sickening suggestion of common guilt"(n.pag.) in Brown's words. It is true that Brown, as such, is a far more repulsive and notorious individual than Jim, but the parallels between them are complicated by the fact that Brown does not pretend to be anything more than what he is: a lowlife. Jim, meanwhile, has concealed from the people of Patusan, who respect him so much, the skeletons in his closet. Partly out of the fear that Brown's presence may blow the lid off his past, and partly because of his guilt over his past that makes him feel a sort of kinship with Brown, Jim stops short of indicting the latter ("Men act badly sometimes without being much worse than others"(n.pag.), he says, in what is as much a defence of Brown as of himself), and decides to let the pirate and his men withdraw peacefully from Patusan, on condition that they cause no trouble. Brown betrays him by ambushing a camp run by Dain Waris, the son of the local chieftain Doramin and Jim's best friend, causing the deaths of Dain and the other people in that camp. Jim's misplaced trust in Brown thus turns out to be the second mistake of his life, and one that, in fact, is worse than the mistake of abandoning *Patna*, because the ship, fortunately, had not sunk, and the lives on board had been saved by others' intervention. Brown's attacks claim many lives, and the reason this mishap takes place is that Jim's insecurity and discomfort over his past, which Brown had so adroitly tapped into, makes Jim treat the brigand more leniently than Brown deserves. The very error—the *Patna* incident—whose consequences Jim had tried to get over through his actions in the "clean slate"(n.pag.) of Patusan has reared its head once more by influencing his judgment. Till the very final days of his life, therefore, he is unable to escape the peripherality that he has been plunged into by his desertion of *Patna*. "Loneliness", he feels in the aftermath of the massacre by Brown, "was closing on him."(n.pag.) Jim decides to take the responsibility for his action by facing the grieving Doramin instead of slipping away, and his death at Doramin's hands has been interpreted by some as a triumphant, redemptive end to his life. But does Jim's sacrifice really make much of a difference,

and is there actually any nobility in the gesture? The damage caused by Brown cannot be rectified by Jim's death. The sorrow that Dain's parents and the kin of the others killed by Brown are feeling can hardly be lessened by the fact that Jim has died too. As Michiel Heyns says:

...if to the outside world Jim's death remains incomprehensible, to the inhabitants of Patusan it seems a betrayal... He dies, then, "as unflinching as a hero in the book" (6), to recall the dream of heroism which he cherished on the training ship. But the book is not *Lord Jim*; or rather, it both is and is not *Lord Jim*: Jim dies unflinchingly in the book called *Lord Jim*, but he dies as unflinchingly as the hero of some other book, the romance on which he has based his life and his code of conduct. Jim's death is his sacrifice to "that faithfulness which made him in his own eyes the equal of the impeccable men who never fall out of the ranks" (393). Jim is, finally, himself like a figure in a book, of the same imaginative essence as the people of Patusan—and yet he is deserting them at the call of an ideal they don't share or understand.(87)

To conclude, Jim's past keeps him in the grips of peripherality in two ways: his guilt over his desertion, as we have seen, makes him unable to gauge the threat posed by Brown and results in the deaths of Dain and the rest, while his continued cherishing of notions of heroism gleaned from light reads (also a tendency from his past) makes him embrace death himself, without any consideration for those he is leaving behind. He does not think of Tamb'Itam, his loyal bodyguard who follows him everywhere, and whose earnest entreaties to fight for his life Jim stonily ignores. He does not think of his paramour Jewel, who, after being abandoned by her father, is abandoned by Jim, and has to spend the rest of her lonely life at the house of the kindly merchant Stein. He does not think of Marlow, who has done so much for him and who must now live only with Jim's memory and not be able to see him again. The error of his past (deserting *Patna*) and the cause of that past error (naïve notions about being a hero that blinds him to all else) continue to keep him detached from others, and in a state of peripherality. To recall Harpham's words, Jim is both one of those "who disappoint themselves" and who have "guilty consciences", and the struggle over that disappointment and guilt does not lead, in Jim's case, to a freedom from them, but to being snared more and more in their tangle, even in the faraway land of Patusan. Jim's perpetual peripherality echoes what Conrad had written in one of his letters: "There isn't any expiation. Each act of life is final, and inevitably produces its consequences despite all the weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Conrad *Letters* 95)

III

Having discussed how Conrad portrays peripherality in *Lord Jim* (and his other works),

we can now study if the same can be found in the Hindi film adaptations of the novel. The answer, as far as *Kaala Patthar* is concerned, is no, though the way the film begins would make one think otherwise, for Vijay Pal Singh, the counterpart of Jim in the film, starts out a lonelier figure than even Conrad's protagonist does. Like Jim, he had deserted the ship he was an officer on, and fired from the navy, he now works as a labourer at a coal mine, trying to atone for his act of cowardice by rushing to the aid of any fellow worker who has been injured or trapped in the mines. Vijay's daring rescues have made him a hero among the workers, not unlike how Jim's initial successes at Patusan, such as his routing of Sherif Ali, which makes him a venerable figure to the natives of that region. But Vijay, unlike Jim, does not revel in the admiration others have for him. Jim describes his fight against Sherif Ali with a "Homeric peal of laughter" (*Lord Jim*, n.pag.) proudly says to Marlow that the latter "should have seen the splinters fly" (n.pag.) during the battle, and obviously loves the fact that he has become a "Tuan", or Lord, to the people. Vijay, in contrast, seems almost terrified of any praise or veneration, for they remind him all the more of his past, and of the fact that these people at the mines who now regard him a hero do not know of that past. In an early scene, as he is surrounded by the workers who chant "*Vijay bhaiya zindabad*" ("Long live Vijay"), the camera zooms into Vijay's face, as the appreciative chants of the present merge with the cries of anger from Vijay's past, causing his face to contort in agony. In the very next scene, he is seen smashing the things in his room, castigating himself as a coward. Later, when asked where he is from, Vijay replies, "*Kuch log aise bhi toh hote hain jo kahin ke nahin hote*", that he has no place he can claim to hail from or belong to. He leads a solitary life, speaking little, consorting even less with others, and participating only minimally in any group celebrations. During a song, as the other workers dance merrily, Vijay stiffly stands aside, and has to be literally dragged into the festivities; even then, he only awkwardly matches steps with the others, never letting himself go. If the coal mines he works at are Vijay's Patusan, then he has, in a way, already redeemed himself a lot by continuously risking his life and limb for others, but he is so tormented over his desertion of his ship that even his present triumphs cannot compensate for it and bring him out of the peripherality he has banished himself to.

This peripherality is not allowed to persist. The film, as it progresses, gradually draws Vijay back into the human community, thus confirming Vinay Lal's assertion that Hindi cinema is based on an "ethos of inclusivity" (251) that does not allow a loner to remain a loner. As Meheli Sen has aptly noted, Vijay is first drawn into a friendship with the two other lead characters in the film, the engineer Ravi Malhotra and the escaped convict Mangal Singh, and then further made a part of the workers' community as they begin a fight against the greedy, unscrupulous owners of the mines who ignore the workers' safety in favour of money and profits. Ravi and Vijay become friends, Sen observes, when "the former rescues the latter from a tunnel in which he had been trapped by Dhanna, an antagonistic coworker." (154-5) Vijay's relationship with

Mangal, on the other hand, initially takes the form of a “contest of “badass-ness”, as Mangal “constantly baits Vijay in order to demonstrate his own superior toughness”, but these conflicts are but a façade for the homoerotic charge that defines their relationship, “an elaborate courtship ritual between the two heroes”(155), culminating in mutual love and respect when Vijay saves Mangal’s life and donates blood to him. It is this very “affective axis of love, loyalty and friendship between the three male leads” that goes on to “include all the labourers who toil in the mine.”(154) The three of them lead the workers into demanding their rights from the owners, and once the ill-advised mining practices lead to the mines being flooded, putting the workers’ lives at risk, they all come together to rescue as many of them as possible. By the end, Vijay, the peripheral figure, is re-integrated completely into the human community as a hero. Sen says that the “familial ties”(154) so ubiquitous in most Hindi films are practically absent here, but this observation is not entirely correct. We do see Vijay’s parents, first when they disown him after his act of desertion, and then when they accept him back again after his climactic heroics, with the father saying, “We are proud of you, son.” At both the immediate, familial level and the larger, societal one, Vijay finds acceptance and company, no longer the isolato he had been at the beginning.

The reason the film does not abide by the Conradian portrayal of peripherality is not too far to seek. Like most Hindi film adaptations of English literature released prior to 1991, *Kaala Patthar* is only partly based on the text it is adapting. Since most of these adaptations were unauthorized anyway—in the sense that the rights had not been purchased from the author, and there was no official acknowledgment of the film being an adaptation of the book concerned—the films rarely bothered to be faithful to the source material. Instead, they borrowed from the books a particular ingredient (a plot point, a motif, or a character) and weaved around it a film that is rather different from the book, with the standard ingredients of Indian popular cinema jousting for space with the elements from the book. Biren Nag’s *Bees Saal Baad* (1962), for instance, is based on Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, but all that it borrows from the book is the legend about a debauched nobleman’s past actions resulting in his dynasty being cursed, and a clever, ruthless criminal taking advantage of this legend in the present day. There is no Holmes, no Watson, and no hound in the film; the detective’s duties are performed by the Henry Baskerville figure, and the supposed supernatural entity is a singing woman wraith rather than a ghostly dog. The motive behind the killings is different too, and the songs, the scenes of comic relief, and the romance between the hero and the heroine make this very different from the novel. *Kaala Patthar* operates in a similar manner. Vijay’s backstory is entirely identical to Jim’s, and this shapes his actions in the present, and in this regard, the film is an adaptation of *Lord Jim* all right. The rest of the film and the other characters, though, have absolutely nothing in common with Conrad’s tale. The film has other concerns that eat into the portrayal of peripherality which occupies such prominence in *Lord Jim*. Firstly, there is the celebration of friendship among men. Sen, in her essay, elaborates

on the buddy configuration that dominated the Amitabh Bachchan-starrers in the 1970s. Most of the actor's memorable onscreen pairings have been with men, leading, in recent times, to queer readings of those films. (Rao 299-306) Bachchan's male co-stars played his fast friends, with whom he shared a relationship more intense than that with the heroine (hence, the aforementioned queer interpretations). One sees this in *Anand* (1971), *Namak Haaram* (1973), *Zanjeer* (1973), *Sholay* (1975) and *Hera Pheri* (1976). Or, they could be cast as brothers, as in Manmohan Desai's *Amar Akbar Anthony* (1977), *Parvarish* (1977) and *Suhaag* (1979). Regardless of the tenor of the relationship, Bachchan's films, for the most part, chronicle the love among men, and sometimes, as is the case with *Kaala Patthar*, this love extends to encompass an entire community, leading to a fight for human rights in general. This brings us to the second concern of the film, namely, advocating workers' rights. Salim Khan and Javed Akhtar, popularly known as Salim-Javed, scripted the film, and they were known for harnessing the usual ingredients of masala cinema (fight scenes, romance, songs—all of which are present in *Kaala Patthar* too) to address social issues. In *Zanjeer*, *Deewaar* (1975) and *Trishul* (1978), the issues were organized crime, urban slum poverty and real estate rivalry respectively. In *Kaala Patthar*, it is labour rights. Both of these concerns in *Kaala Patthar*—celebrating same-sex love among men, and advocating the rights of workers—preclude a sustained portrayal of loneliness and peripherality, for both require the protagonist, Vijay, to develop relationships with others, to work together with them to achieve the desired results. The film, then, is an account of the good that can be done when people unite for a noble purpose, and this celebration of unity automatically leaves little room for Conradian peripherality to feature prominently. If we are to borrow Kline's words, *Kaala Patthar* treats Conrad's book as raw material, taking from it what it needs to give its hero a poignant backstory, and jettisoning the rest to tell what is, ultimately, a different story.

If a film must have at least some noticeable plot similarities to a book in order to qualify as an adaptation of the latter, then *Kaala Patthar* is the only adaptation of *Lord Jim* (or indeed, of Conrad) in Hindi cinema. Baradwaj Rangan, in his review of Kabir Khan's *Phantom* (2015), does describe the protagonist Daniyal Khan as being “drawn from the *Lord Jim* template”¹, but any similarities between this film and Conrad's novel are entirely on the surface. Daniyal, unlike Jim or even Vijay, is not actually guilty of the act of desertion for which he is dishonourably discharged from the Indian army; a credibility-stretching flashback reveals he was dismissed because of a misunderstanding. By thus making him ‘nobler’ than Conrad's character, the film distances itself from the book, and the rest of it has little in common with Conrad's unsparing, fatalistic portrayal of loneliness and suffering. Instead, the film is happy to be a gung-ho action movie, as Daniyal is recruited by RAW to take out the terrorists responsible for planning 26/11, and proceeds to do so with a Rambo-like gusto, tapping into the gory, ultra-nationalist fantasy a lot of Indians may have had about seeing those who had unleashed terror on Mumbai get their comeuppance. In terms of plot *or*

characterization *or* themes, then, *Phantom* has precious little to do with *Lord Jim*.

A film released a few years before *Phantom*, in 2007, on the other hand, turns out to have more of Conrad in it than one would think. Vishram Sawant's *Risk*, when it first hit the theatres, was mostly written off as the umpteenth saga of rivalry between the police and gangsters that the production house of Ram Gopal Varma, who financed the film, is known for. Watching it, though, anyone who has read *Lord Jim* is likely to be startled by the things the two have in common. For sure, the setting (the crime-infested underbelly of contemporary Mumbai) and the chief storyline (a policeman trying to rid his city of crime) are different. Moreover—and here *Risk* is similar to *Kaala Patthar*—the film is not a one-to-one mapping of Conrad's book, in the sense that each character in the film does not correspond to a character in *Lord Jim*. But as far as the story beats regarding the central character are concerned, a similarity to Jim is unmissable—a man with fixed (and misguided) notions of heroism, his downfall as a result of acting according to those notions, his endeavour to redeem himself, a second error of judgment on his part that leads to other people dying, and his final, fatal, desperate step to make amends, culminating, possibly, in his death. Suryakant Satam, the protagonist of *Risk*, is introduced as a no-nonsense police officer, but a careful study of his character indicates that he, like Jim, derives his ideas about how a uniformed officer is supposed to act from the world of fiction. In the case of Jim, this fiction is light literature. In Suryakant's case, it seems to be films. His strapping looks that put him in sharp contrast to the portly policemen around him (even when in prison, he works out diligently), the way he stuffs his guns down the front of his trousers, and the swaggering manner in which he walks and speaks lend him a distinct movie star persona, as does the fact that his name routinely appears in the newspapers when he kills criminals, and it is clear that Suryakant, much like a page three celebrity, basks in the attention he thus receives in the press. The words “hero” and “herogiri” and “hero *ban raha hain*” (“he is trying to be a hero”) are frequently used in reference to Suryakant, and given that the film is set in Mumbai, the city of Bollywood, this repeated use of the term “hero” invariably acquires a cinematic connotation. Above all, there is his trigger-happy manner of dealing with criminals: he prefers to shoot them rather than arresting them, believing that this uproots the crime as opposed to letting it linger on, much as a Dirty Harry would do. Indeed, given Suryakant's aforementioned propensity for movie-star strutting, it is not unreasonable to assume that he has modelled his approach to fighting crime on Clint Eastwood's San Francisco cop, or at least, on Amitabh Bachchan's Vijay Khanna from *Zanjeer*. After all, the gangster Khalid, the chief antagonist, describes Suryakant using the language of the movies, calling him a “one-man show”, and even his paramour, Shraddha, is an upcoming actress, a fact which hints further at Suryakant's attraction to the world of films, despite not belonging to it professionally.

Suryakant is warned that his reckless gun-toting is going to land him in trouble,

and soon enough, it does, when he shoots and kills two individuals to control the agitation surrounding the arrest of a corrupt politician; though the people he has killed were troublemakers, things are so arranged as to make it seem that he has killed innocent civilians. The parallels with Jim are apparent. Jim has studied and gained the qualifications to be a part of the merchant navy, but his unrealistic ideas about being a hero leave him incapable of dealing with an actual crisis. Suryakant, similarly, is a dedicated police officer, and there is no doubt about his commitment to battling crime, but he has continued in his trigger-happy ways for so long that he cannot think of any other way to perform his duties. He fires his gun almost as reflex action, unaware of the need for restraint or tact when dealing with troublesome people or circumstances. In one scene, he is told, “*Police gun sabko deti hain par chalti sirf teri hain*”, that all cops are given a gun, but he alone uses it so regularly on others. He thinks there is only this one way of finishing crime and thus becoming a hero (it bears repetition that he enjoys the attention the media gives him for his deeds). The criminals who decide to cause him trouble take advantage of this very tendency on his part; they knew that should a commotion erupt in front of the politician’s house, Suryakant *shall* shoot first and ask questions later, and that is precisely what he does, leading to his being suspended and arrested. Suryakant is then forced to cut a deal with Khalid—the latter arranges for Suryakant’s release and ensures that he gets his job back, but in return he must be on Khalid’s payroll, working for him by eliminating Khalid’s rival gangsters and making sure that his business interests in Mumbai are safeguarded. Needless to say, thus bartering away his conscience causes Suryakant untold amounts of grief, and he tries to fix things by using Khalid’s growing trust in him to lay a trap for the gangster, and his machinations finally lead to Khalid being arrested and put in police custody. This would seem like a triumph, much like Jim’s victory over Sherif Ali in Patusan, but as with *Lord Jim*, more troubles await the protagonist as Suryakant realizes he had underestimated Khalid’s power and reach: not only has Khalid bribed enough officials to make sure he is going to be released, but has also had Suryakant’s colleagues killed to teach him a lesson. Suryakant is devastated by the realization that merely putting Khalid behind the bars has not been enough to prevent him from harming others, and that his inability to foresee this has resulted in the deaths of others, much as Jim’s misjudgment that Brown can be trusted to keep his word leads to the deaths of Dain Waris and many others in Patusan. Jim responds by taking the bullet from Doramin. Suryakant gets the satisfaction of killing Khalid, but is riddled with bullets himself by the guards of the prison where Khalid was being held, and though the film leaves it unclear if he lives or dies, what is absolutely clear is that any ‘victory’ he may have achieved is, like Jim’s, a Pyrrhic one. Khalid may have died, but his guilt has not been proven before the world at large in a court of law; the people killed by Khalid, whose security Suryakant had not ensured owing to his own shortsightedness, are not coming back; and should Suryakant recover from his injuries, he is not going to be rewarded for killing a gangster, but penalized for killing an undertrial person.

The similarities between Jim and Suryakant include their descent into loneliness and peripherality because of their own mistakes. After Suryakant kills the two people at the politician's residence, he finds himself in prison, and multiple shots show him languishing there alone; even his sympathetic superior, Uttam Bhandari, cannot have him released. Once he *is* released, his peripherality is only compounded. His innate honesty prevents him from actually swearing allegiance to Khalid and integrating himself into the criminal circles, but since he does owe his release to Khalid, he has to render his services to the latter. Besides, he also finds himself isolated from those around him. His fellow officers mock him, aware that he is doing Khalid's bidding. He grows distant from his mother, who takes pride in her son's accomplishments as a policeman and whom he can therefore not face any longer, now that he is at Khalid's mercy. Even Shraddha misunderstands him, making Suryakant glower at her and say that he had thought she, at least, would be sympathetic. Suryakant's predicament is painful—he values his uniform, his position as a police officer, more than anything else in the world (“*vardi ke bina jee nahin paoonga*”, he says, that he shall not be able to live without his uniform), but to get back that uniform and position, he must betray what they stand for by allying with Khalid. The only way he can see out of the predicament is by ensnaring Khalid and delivering him to the law, and when he sets out to do this, he grows even more distant from others. He cannot attend to his mother when she falls ill and dies; he sends Shraddha away so that she would not be harmed by Khalid; and in his preoccupation to have Khalid arrested, he forgets that his colleagues, too, can be harmed, and thus makes no arrangements for *their* safety. Ruppel had said that Jim's obsession with getting a second opportunity to prove himself and making good of that opportunity consumes him so much that he becomes incapable of sustaining a relationship with anyone, finally consummating, in a manner of speaking, his relationship with his “bride”—the opportunity—in death. Suryakant grows similarly obsessed with cleansing himself of the stench of associating with Khalid and becoming an honourable police officer again, and this, as stated before, takes its toll on his relationships, making him lonelier. In the end, he has to break the very law he had sworn to serve by rushing into the prison and shooting Khalid, and is gunned down by fellow lawmen for this transgression. It is fair to say that when Suryakant, in the final scene, lies in the throes of death, his peripherality is complete: he belongs, as he lies dying, to neither the world of crime nor that of law, despite his trysts with both, and his loved ones are deceased or far away from him.

By now, it should be clear that what *Risk* borrows from *Lord Jim* is not so much the plot but the sensibility. Unlike *Kaala Patthar*, this film does not try to pull its protagonist out of the peripherality he has thrown himself into, and denies viewers what had made the lapse of Vijay palatable—his eventual redemption in the end. Hindi cinema does often have its heroes make mistakes, but at least in the mainstream films, he has atoned for it by the end, and found salvation, in life or in death. In refusing to grant Suryakant this salvation (at least not in clear cut terms), *Risk* adheres more

faithfully to Conrad than *Kaala Patthar* did. In this regard, one may compare it to a film released in the same year: Sriram Raghavan's *Johnny Gaddar*. Based on the works of James Hadley Chase, it is a faithful adaptation whose fidelity is manifested not so much in plot (for it does not adapt any particular novel of Chase) but in sensibility, for it portrays, as Chase did, a sordid milieu of shady deals, money-laundering, and gang-violence, characters who are morally compromised engaging in double-crosses and betrayal, a high body count, and a shocking twist at the end. There is not a single likeable person or noble gesture in the film, the tone is relentlessly dark (the humour, too, is of the blacker variety), and the common ingredients of Hindi popular cinema, such as song-and-dance sequences, are not present. In other words, *Johnny Gaddar* stays true to the grim, gritty, urban noir essence of Chase. Transcultural literary adaptations like *Risk* and *Johnny Gaddar* are often faithful in this very sense: they aim at replicating the sensibility, the essence, the fundamental tenor of the literary work instead of the precise plot details, for the changes in setting often makes plot-wise fidelity difficult to maintain. If the literary work in question is something as downbeat as *Lord Jim*, then replicating its sensibility makes for niche cinema. If such niche films have been made in larger numbers of late—by new age filmmakers like Sawant, Raghavan, Anurag Kashyap, Dibakar Banerjee and Navdeep Singh—then that can be attributed to certain changes that have occurred following the liberalization of the Indian economy in 1991, and which may be studied using what Kline has called the Materialist paradigm of film adaptations. Ranjani Mazumdar describes these changes as “transformations in the circuits of cinema after globalization.”(155) Two of these changes, she says, are most significant in facilitating the niche cinema. The first is the rise of multiplexes in post-liberalization India. Since multiplexes, unlike single-screen theatres, hold shows for more than one film, there is space in a multiplex for niche fares together with more commercially viable films. Moreover, since multiplexes are located in cities, and cater to a mostly urban, educated audience, they provide the niche films with a stronger chance of attracting viewers who would be more interested in watching offbeat works of cinema. Mazumdar says that the multiplex audience is “a more refined audience that gives filmmakers a chance to experiment with new ideas.”(154) Tejaswini Ganti reiterates the same when she identifies “the arrival of the multiplex” as the factor that “allows filmmakers to make the films they really want.”(110) The multiplexes, then, allow a film like *Risk*—which stays true to Conrad's unremitting portrayal of peripherality and does not grant its protagonist an eleventh-hour redemption—to find theatrical release and run alongside a more mainstream film. The latter may still be more successful financially, but the fact that a multiplex can accommodate multiple films lets something like *Risk* to also do business.

The second change that Mazumdar mentions is “the accelerated circulation of international cinema through DVDs” in the aftermath of the liberalization and globalization hitting Indian shores. She elaborates:

DVDs are now available through rental networks managed by scores of small DVD shops that have emerged in the neighborhoods of all big cities in India. Added to this is a fairly powerful culture of downloading films, something that has become popular after the entry of high-speed Internet connectivity that provides greater bandwidth to download films. Downloaded films are also circulating within a community of cinephiles. There is also the pirate market where European art cinemas, Hollywood films, and contemporary Asian cinema are all available for sale. Information about these films also circulates informally. The proliferation of DVD culture has led to the resurgence of film clubs, short film appreciation courses, and regular screenings and discussions of films at universities, research institutions and other prominent venues. In cities like Delhi, Calcutta, and Bombay a growing presence of cinephile culture is now evident. (155)

If the multiplexes have played a part in ensuring the making and release of the niche films, this “DVD culture” may be the reason why the recent niche films that are based on foreign literary sources (such as *Risk*) are often more faithful to the books than yesteryear adaptations used to be. The easier, wider availability of international cinema in India in the wake of the liberalization and globalization of Indian economy has meant that the new age directors have had greater access to the foreign films, and their sensibilities as filmmakers have been influenced by the styles and idioms of these films. Consequently, they are less concerned than their predecessors about maintaining an “Indian” flavour in their films by including the prevalent ingredients of Indian popular cinema. Hence, while an earlier adaptation of *Lord Jim* like *Kaala Patthar* had to surround Jim/Vijay’s backstory, lifted *in toto* from the book, with the conventions of Hindi popular cinema that were then in vogue, a more contemporary adaptation like *Risk* can adhere more faithfully to the Conradian sensibility and eschew the Bollywood conventions. This is caused not so much by a desire to “respect” the literary source as by the unconcern over Indianizing the literary source; that unconcern often translates, as it does in the case of *Risk*, into fealty to the book. Sawant, it ought to be remembered, is a protégé of Ram Gopal Varma, who started making films around the same time that the aforementioned changes brought about through liberalization and globalization began to take place, and his films, accordingly, betray a noticeable foreign influence. His first film, *Siva* (1989), is an unacknowledged remake of Bruce Lee’s *Way of the Dragon* (1972); his horror films such as *Raat* (1992) and *Phoonk* (2008) are essentially riffs on *The Exorcist* (1973); *Sarkar* (2005) is his take on *The Godfather* (1972); *Nishabd* (2007) is equal parts *Lolita* (1962) and *Poison Ivy* (1992); and his musical *Rangeela* (1995) is, by his own admission, influenced by films like *Singin’ In the Rain* (1952) and *The Sound of Music* (1965)², while *Contract* (2008) has its similarities to the *Rambo* films³. As his protégé, Sawant—like other Varma disciples like Kashyap

and Raghavan—has his foreign cinema influences which preclude a desire to Indianize his films. Therefore, when he adapts *Lord Jim*, he may not be able to retain Conrad's setting (for the world Conrad wrote about has long since changed, and also because Sawant is an Indian director making his film for an Indian audience), but he keeps the chief story beats and the temperament of the novel intact, including the theme of self-created peripherality that ails so many Conradian protagonists.

Endnotes

1. Baradwaj Rangan. "Review: *Phantom*." <https://baradwajrangan.wordpress.com/2015/08/31/phantom-a-revenge-fantasy-with-good-thrills-bad-acting/> Accessed on 1st December, 2017.
2. Baradwaj Rangan. "Interview: Ram Gopal Varma." <https://baradwajrangan.wordpress.com/2008/08/14/interview-ram-gopal-varma/> Accessed on 1st December, 2017.
3. Ibid.

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Negotiating the Genre of Autobiography: Selected Indian Literary Texts

D. Murali Manohar

In this paper I would like to explore the challenge that posed while reading and teaching the three texts. They are Kamala Das' *My Story* (1976), claimed to be an autobiography but readers and critics have questioned it; Bama's *Karukku* (2000) has been taught as text in literature departments and question her claims as she does not use her name as narrator; and P. Sivakami's *The Grip of Change* (2006) is not claimed as autobiography but an autobiographical text. However, she reveals the characters, intentions and associations as an autobiographer does. One is being from the mainstream literature and other two are being from the marginalized narratives.

If one were to go back to what consists of autobiography, one can think of (limited) life story, memoirs, diary entries, letters, "events", anecdotes, facts but only facts etc. R. Raphael talking about writing an autobiography says:

It must be noted that not all can write autobiographies. Before writing his or her 'story', the autobiographer must have lived his or her life *fully*. Every human being leads a twofold existence; the inner or subjective world of meditation, introspection, beliefs, and convictions, and the external or objective life of adventures structured in a chronological or historical order. A genuine autobiography should be much more than a book of deeds of externalized adventures; it must also explore the world of inner consciousness.... This means that the autobiographer must have lived his life according to certain noble principles and ideals. The struggles and tribulations that such a person encounters in upholding these principles and the joy and satisfaction connected with their achievements alone can make the autobiographer's life worth reading. The autobiographer must, therefore, live not only his or her private life, but also that of his or her age. (129)

To my knowledge autobiography genre had started from African-American slave narratives such as Fredrick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845), Booker T. Washington's *Up From Slavery* (1901), W. B. Debois' *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept*

(1940), Richard Wright's semi-autobiographical work entitled *Black Boy* (1945), Piri Thomas' *Down These Mean Streets* (1965), Malcom X' *The Autobiography of Malcom X* (1965), Maya Angelou *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969) and others. We have many autobiographies from mainstream literature in India such as Mahatma Gandhi's *My Experiments with Truth* (1927) Jawaharlal Nehru's *Discovery of India* (1946). We do have autobiographies from marginalized literature such as Sharan Kumar Limbale's *The Outcaste* (2003), Narendra Jadhav's *Outcaste: A Memoir* (2003), Omprakash Valmiki's *Jhootan*, Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* (2009) and others.

While teaching the three texts such as Kamala Das' *My Story*, Bama's *Karukku* which have been claimed as autobiographies by the authors themselves and various academic critics, on the one hand, the question that arises is: in what way they fit into the genre of autobiography? On the other hand P. Sivakami, a Dalit Writer who was an IAS officer and left for the writing and for activism, wrote a novel entitled *The Grip of Change* though Sivakami did not claim it as an autobiography but as fiction; why cannot we consider this as autobiography as the novelist herself writes the Part II as the intentions of the characters?

Let me talk about Kamala Das' *My Story* which is from mainstream literature. It is considered as an autobiography which has many fictional elements. There is a big debate whether the autobiography should consist of facts or fiction. However much one claims that one has used only facts still there will be an element of fiction. The act of memory which is part of fact by translating it into the writing it has an inherent fiction. Critics have looked at this text as novel or autobiography. The controversy goes on even today about this text. One of the critics says: "Apart from her 'sex-story' there is nothing enduring and endearing about Kamala Das's *Story*." (Raphael *Indian*: 131) Raphael further adds that "*My Story* is written as if it were a novel" (p. 133) and "the book as a whole lacks art and proportion" (p.132). The last adverse remark that Raphale makes about Das' autobiography is that "it is my firm belief that Kamala narrates her *Story* with a view to capture the young" (135). Whether you read Kamala Das' poetry or her autobiography or her short stories, one gets to know the content is same in the three genres. She has written one novel entitled *Alphabet of Lust* (1977) and one short story collection entitled *Padmavati, the Harlot and other Stories* (1992).

Coming to the next text Bama's *Karukku* which has been one of the best and short autobiographies from Dalit literature apart from her two novels such as *Sangati* (2005) and *Vanmam* (2011); one short story collection entitled *Harum Scarum Saar and Other Stories* (2007). She uses the first person narrative and her focus is not so much on her story rather it is the story of her Dalit community which Sharan Kumar Limbale calls "collective responsibility" and "social responsibility" (Limbale *Towards*

2004). My concern is that whether it is considered as an autobiography. If so, in what way does it qualify as an autobiography? Critics have looked at this work as a “Testimony” (Nayar 2004). Is it a testimony when she herself has not claimed it as her autobiography? What Bama claims herself in her preface is that “events that occurred during many stages of my life” (p. xiii) but mind you she does not say her life. Can events be a life story? There are elements of memory, facts, experiences, caste oppression and discrimination which qualify to be an autobiography. In the introduction to the book the translator Lakshmi Holmstorm says:

The events of Bama’s life are not arranged according to a simple, linear, or chronological order, as with most autobiographies, but rather, reflected upon in different ways, repeated from different perspectives, grouped under different themes, for example, Work, Games, and Recreation, Education, Belief etc. (Bama *Karukku* VII)

The question one has to ask is: how much of her life is part of her autobiography? Can we have her sequel of *Karukku* in the next book? It is possible to have later life as additional information. Is she willing to write additional information as a living writer? Maya Angelou’s autobiography *I Know* is up to an age of seventeen who has been raped by a white male. She is describing her agony in that book. Can we consider that as a life story/autobiography? Can we have sequel of her *I Know*?

Coming to my last text P. Sivakami’s *The Grip of Change* has challenged literary theory of autobiography by writing the explanation of her characters in Part II of her novel. In the name of character called Gowri who represents the novelist herself, deconstructs the text by revealing her intentions of the characters. In Part II the novelist writes: “The novelist and the character in the novel, Gowri, must be one and the same person” (Sivakami 2006: 134). As a writer she has every right to do what she wants to do. She need not bother about the literary theory. As a literary critic we have to worry about the text and its placement in the genres. She talks about her father in the novel who has been shrewd politician but in his real life he was very meek, timid, submissive, apprehensive person. He was humiliated by the Tahsildar but never protested against. I would like to substantiate by quoting novelist words for you:

When her father was elected a member of the legislative assembly in the first general elections, the tahsildar had not offered him a seat when he had entered the man’s office. The tahsildar had also insulted her father in the manner in which he had addressed him. After her father left, the tahsildar had apparently grumbled about being forced to treat a Parayan as an equal.

Her father had come home, locked himself in a room and wept. (Sivakami 2006:

140)

She was one of the twelve children in her real life whereas in novel she has been the second and last. It is interesting to see another passage where Sivakami comments on Mahatma Gandhi and his autobiography. She says:

Could a writer avoid subjective conclusions? A careful reading can easily identify the subjective quality with the just the changing notations. The character Gowri in the novel, the *Grip of Change*, appeared too good to be true; or else, she had not been drawn with sufficient. Gandhi had made an attempt at self-analysis in his book *My Experiments with Truth* after his image as a mahatma had been already consolidated. He had restricted his self-analysis to his private life, not examining his public life and political views, which in turn had concerned many lives. Was it because he feared that his image as a mahatma might be shattered? (Sivakami 2006: 148)

I have just given a few details so as to show how the writer can create disciplinary or genre difficulties for the literary reader.

I would like to conclude my paper to say that autobiography genre was considered to be one of the genres in literature departments with theoretical background starting from African American literature to Indian mainstream Literature and Dalit literature. As a teacher as well as researcher, I have chosen three texts such as Kamala Das' *My Story*, Bama's *Karukku* and P. Sivakami's *The Grip of Change* to prove how they have posed challenge to the genre called autobiography. In other words I am not saying other autobiographies have not posed challenge to the genre. For this presentation I have chosen only three texts.

Thanks to Prof. Purushottam for giving me this opportunity to think and share this piece of information with you. I am sure there will be several questions on my brief presentation. Thank you.

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Text as an archive of Community: A Reading of Aravind Malagatti's Dalit autobiography *Government Brahmana*

**Ujjwal Jana
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The emergence of autobiography as a mode of representation in Dalit literary context has challenged the very idea of 'self expression' from other writings in the same genre in traditional Indian literature. The autobiographical writings in canonical Indian literature have been structured within a prescribed style, language and subject. They have always remained elitist in representation, selective in circumscribing the voices of the people and artful in language. The romanticised notion of the self and its narration is what has constituted the world of their contemplation. The awareness of the sordid reality of lived experiences of the multitudes in a society splintered by caste hegemony and discriminatory practices have never surfaced in their writings. The celebration of the individual glory and grand discourses of the nation have marked the fabric of their narratives. The representation of the peripheral world of the marginal people has hardly found any mention in it. Dalit Autobiography, on the other hand, has contested this elitist representation of identity, society and culture thereby creating what Sarah Beth Hunt appropriately calls, "an important literary space for the expression of Dalit Social and cultural experiences..." (177).

As the very term 'autobiography' defines, it can be split into three components: auto- self, bio- life and graph- writing. In dalit literature, autobiographical forms can be found in poem, fiction, drama, travelogue, etc. In her book *Writing Caste/Writing Gender: Narrating Dalit Women's Testimonies*, Sharmila Rege has pertinently raised some questions relating to the critical roles played by Dalit Autoiographies as a significant mode of representation. "Can the dalit life narrative be called an *atmacharita* (dalit autobiography)? Is it better described as *dalitmakathan/svakathan* (defined as narratives of dalit self and community)? Are dalit life narratives a moral source for political movements or reminders of a hateful past?"

In response to Rege's questions, it can be said that dalit life narrative has a distinct structural pattern, quite different from the traditional one, with central emphasis on its role as a documented vision of an individual located in a socio-historical context. Of course it transcends the bounds of an individual narrative and becomes the saga of a community or milieu at large.

In this essay what is going to be attempted is the representative role that an

autobiography plays in the dissemination of a worldview. The following questions are going to be addressed in the essay with reference to Aravinda Malagatti's modern Kannada classic *Government Brahmana* (1994).

Is Dalit Autobiography simply a narrative of an individual to represent his/her saga of pain? Is it just an *atmasharita* ("I" narrative) in line with the traditional mode of personal narrative? Or a reflection of the community world view? Or a poignant expression of the collective consciousness of their community?

Aravind Malagatti, an eminent Dalit writer from Kannada, in his autobiography *Government Brahmana* has narrated the bitter and challenging experiences which he faced throughout his daily life. Malagatti's interaction with the society was completely different from that of other dalit writers. Being in a rural place, he suffered a lot by the upper caste people. Malagatti lived in a place where there was no feeling of togetherness; instead they were struggling and sufferings which had made the dalits to be silent over the centuries. Malagatti was not influenced by any other person in the society; he was impressed and guided by his elder brother. Interaction with a dalit group like Dalit Sangarsha Samiti (DSS) made him speak courageously, maintain self-control, a broader mind, speak out from his heart and listen to others' views with patience. 'For a body that grew up on bitterness, even poison becomes ambrosia' (Malagatti 118). Likewise the autobiographer faced so hardships of life that he had got used to it. Unlike other dalit community people, Malagatti came across many ideologies and biased non-dalit practices in his village and even in cities. The 'experience of discrimination' and 'Dalit identity' is what constitutes the major themes of his autobiography.

Being the first Kannada dalit autobiography, *Government Brahmana* has given rise to many such hidden stories of dalits through their personal narratives. Malagatti through his autobiography has portrayed the life of an 'ordinary' untouchable who has been alienated from the castiest society. It also narrates the life of the autobiographer who has been in 'a journey of a 'no-man' in search of his own identity and rights as a human being, on a more personal level, and as an academic personality, at social/professional level' (Manujendra 67).

Through writing his life's story, Malagatti feels that it is enhanced 'to test the waters within my self rather than throw a stone into the waters of the lake outside' (Malagatti 118). In other words, the narrator accepts that the activity of telling and writing constructs a sense of the self and the world by breaking down the boundaries between people and groups. The autobiographer in his book '... speaks across all borders and personal boundaries to ask for greater human awareness and sensitivity, to ask for social change' (Malagatti xvi).

Government Brahmana is the story of an ordinary dalit entering into a modern

world leaving behind him the past of traditional boundaries which they had been heaving. Even after gaining the constitutional rights, the castiest people are trying to bind dalits with their traditional occupation. This story does not suggest that even though the dalits enjoy certain freedom and fundamental rights, they are completely liberated. But the true fact is that the castiest society brings new kinds of restrictions in the place of the old forms of cruelty. When we look at the title of his autobiography, it is clear that it is new way of referring to a dalit who got the government reservation benefits enshrined in the Constitution of India. The dalits have rejected the traditional occupation which they used to do and started doing the respectable job like that of Brahmins. Professor Aravind Malagatti, who belongs to modern space, is leading a respectable life even if he comes from a dalit community. The autobiographer tells about his present status that has created a dignified distance between his village friends whom he knows from childhood days and him. When something has to be addressed, they call him as 'ri' (sir) with an impression that he is a 'big man' now (Malagatti 1). The urban friends treat him with much contempt and indifference making him doubly alien. The autobiographer also narrates the events related to other dalits in his surrounding place which makes his writing a collective dalit experience. For instance, while narrating his futile love story, he brings out another jilted love story of a brilliant dalit youth. 'It is clear that he has selected for narration those experiences/incidents which would help us to theorise Dalit experience in general' (Malagatti 122).

Aravind Malagatti wrote his autobiography after he became employed. Being a dalit lecturer he underwent many experiences- 'they have been bitter, ripe, sour and also violent in nature' (Malagatti 118). Malagatti has ingenuously exposed the habits of the upper caste people of the society. The autobiographical narrative is in the form of a series of episodes from the author's childhood to his adolescent age. This autobiography contains twenty-two chapters with the subtitles. In the introductory chapter, the narrator informs us about his present social status and his family background. He was also criticized for writing about the lowly works done by dalits, by his family and friends. He answered them back, 'One needs to have a brave heart to write all this' (Malagatti 4). The narrator has portrayed his village and dalits' natural world in the initial scenes of the autobiography. Throughout the narration, the narrator has moved to every nook and corners of his life story. On the other side of it, he has also described its place of action which is very authentic. For example, "Tomorrow's turn for sweeping: Mala Katti" narrates school event and "The story of the stolen cotton" narrates about theft done by narrator. "The incident of being a fake brahmin" narrates a terrible situation in Mantralaya where the autobiographer happened to visit once with his college friends. Some of the later chapters narrate the attitude of urban places to a rural people, that to a dalit. This autobiography is a conversation between the narrator and the reader; and Dr. Malagatti is conscious of the reader quoted as 'I

would like to read my life on my own and I would also like to be the first reader of my life' (Malagatti 1). Malagatti never lets the readers go without thinking about the events he narrated. The narrator often ends the chapter with the questions that are directed to the reader: 'How can a society which does not let even the creations of Vishwamithra make love naturally give a chance to human lovers to meet?' (Malagatti 25).

The autobiographer has used narrative mode in his text. The narrator has used present tense and future tense as 'He should not enter the temple./ He should teach under the tree./ Thus my father started working' (Malagatti 112). The narration of events is in chronological order. The names of places are realistic like Mantralaya, villages like Kuntoji and Basakod, cities like Mangalore and Dharwad, gods like Hanuman and Raghavendra, leaders like B.R. Ambedkar, Vivekananda, Sardar Patel, Nehru, Gandhi which can be seen in *Government Brahmana*.

Dalit autobiography not only narrates the individual's life but they also narrate the life of 'others' as well. Through autobiographies, dalits organise resistance to fight against oppressions which they have been facing down the ages. Dalits have made writings a weapon for their assertion. The suffering stories of dalit writers blend with personal feelings and community emotions which they experience in Hindu society.

In *Government Brahmana* there is a mixture of different tones which are always filled with sadness, anger, humour, confession, conversation, irony etc. The narrator's serious tone can be realised in the chapter "With you reader... before you read" where he speaks about the purpose of writing his autobiography and about his family.

In the chapter "With you reader... before you read", Malagatti writes about the problems faced by him when he wrote his intense and realistic experiences of dalit community as well as his own life of being dalit. He has become alien in his own village and his Keri (colony). The people, who were teasing are no longer attempting to treat him disrespectfully of his present social status. His aim to write the autobiography has been expressed without any bigotry. The narrator in all his writings has talked about his people and his colony. His chikkappa (father's younger-brother) opposed him writing about the liquor drinking dalit women's in his novel *Kaarya*. For him it was like 'defaming ourselves' (Malagatti 3). The quality of directness and luminosity in experiences is very agile (creative) in his writings. The narrator has embellished his grandmother who is mentioned as 'multifaceted personality' (Malagatti 5). She was truly supportive and a strong woman who laid down the foundation for the family and his brothers. Her early departure from the world of his life is 'an irrecoverable loss' (Malagatti 5) and for him she 'appears as a character in this sage of my (narrators) life' (Malagatti 6). The narrator has an immense respect for his chikkappa (father's brother) and his grandmother who helped him to build his future life.

The childhood days of the narrator were full of humiliations, starvation, poverty and untouchability. The poverty as an exploiter, was exterminating the lives of the dalits to its possible extent. To get the comforts he was depending on whatever work or means found for their fulfilment. Man always strives to fulfil his hunger which sometimes become impossible on his part. In chapter “Coins on the corpse and the wedding feast”, the autobiographer narrates the life of poverty where they even didn’t have food to eat. Their hesitation to go at the doors of the rich non-dalits to get some food is very moving. In the system of oppressive society like India, ‘Dalits have devised mechanisms to negotiate the sustenance of their bare minimum existence’ (Malagatti 122). For the narrator’s family, any death of a rich person in the village was fetching coins which would support his own existence. The source of getting the coins was the funeral procession of the corpse. As it was a custom, the Hindu upper-caste families would throw coins on the corpse. But they were permitted to pick it only after the mourner’s passed on the coins which would be lying on the grounds. Because they believe ‘walking on the coins was an act of redemption for them’ (Malagatti 7). Another means of getting food was to visit the wedding feast and village fair. Whenever there is wedding function arranged by the rich people at the narrator’s village, the whole dalit colony would be invited to have food at the function. The narrator’s grandmother would take all her grandchildren’s for the feast, as it was an opportunity to relish delicious dishes. At the wedding hall, the dalits were not allowed to enter in the front gate. When there is increase in number of dalit people for food, a worker with a stick was appointed to control them. The dalits were made to follow certain rules to have meals at village fairs such as not to ask for more food and not to carry food back to home. In addition to this, a strict rule for every dalit was made that nobody could dip the hands in the ink kept outside the gate before going home. It is a symbol to avoid certain dalit people who could enter hall for the second time. Malagatti exclaims that untouchability and poverty was so much powerful in his village, that even if dalits were humiliated, they would be humble towards all and some times out of their helplessness.

In chapter “Dead sheep and meat heaps”, we have an incident where the narrator as a boy was involved in his uncle’s business of selling meat. Aravind would get a share of meat as his reward for his job. As a young boy, the autobiographer was assigned to look after the meat shop owned by his maava (mother’s brother) in case he went outside. The narrator’s anna (brother) also helps maava’s business by skinning and cleaning the dead animals. The people from dalit lane- Madigas, Machagaras, Samagars and Lambanigas would come to purchase the heap where the amount was fixed. For the big heap it was eight annas and for the small heap four annas. Some of the customers would try to steal away the mutton heap, if they are not noticed carefully. Even if the heap is taken care of, every time at least one heap would be stolen away.

Some amount of meat was given to the autobiographer as a reward for his hardship he has suffered. ‘Some parts of the intestine and some parts of the sheep’s stomach! The intestine roasted on fire, and smeared with salt and turmeric powder, was my favourite delicacy. It was my aayi’s favourite too. Aayi taught me this method of roasting the meat with the help of a thin rod. My anna was an expert in cleaning and roasting chicken intestines’ (Malagatti 34). The autobiographer feels disgusted with his present status when he recalls his days of cutting meat and the way of cleaning the meat but as a small boy the cleaning meat, pouring water to the small intestine, etc., was like a game. The untouchability and poverty placed the dalits to eat the meat of the dead animals.

From his childhood the autobiographer only experienced the insults and humiliations. In “Tomorrow’s turn for sweeping: Mala Katti”, the autobiographer has described the dalit students who were not equally treated by the non-dalit teachers and the non-dalit students. The teachers would punish severely not because they did not do their homework nor they were untidy. His dalit friends and he was punished because they skipped sweeping the classroom before the morning prayers at the school. Always the work of sweeping was given to the four dalit students. They were made to sit on the floor. Once his name was twisted as Mala ‘Katti’, (Malagatti 15) when he tried to re-write it. One of his Hindu teachers beat him severely before justifying his act, saying ‘So what if it is written as “katti”? Were you trying to make it “gatti”? The bastard has just learnt to write and he already wants to correct what is written. A katti is a katti anyway’ (Malagatti 16). The non-dalits never missed an opportunity to humiliate and abuse them. When he went to college wearing new cloths and getting the benefits of reservation policy, the non-dalit friends smirked at him, but the narrator would never say anything back to them.

I would unabashedly accept all these degrees and distinctions conferred on me with a grin. When I went to college wearing the new dress Appa had got stitched for me, they would question me, ‘Is your dress a gift from Indramma?’ (Referring to the then prime minister, Indira Gandhi). Even then, I was unable to refute their words. There was every possibility of my answer leading to another taunt. So, I never attempted any justification (Malagatti 61).

In the chapter “The government brahmana’s devotion to lord Raghavendra” and in “The incident of being a fake brahmin”, the autobiographer narrates the pitiable condition of the dalit theists. Malagatti, during his college days, had great devotion for lord Raghavendra and was a great fan of Kannada film actor Rajkumar. The more he had devotion for the god the more he was insulted by the temple authorities. The dalits

were not allowed to be physically close to god, only spiritually they can be closer to god. To believe the existence of god is another problem of dalits. The narrator who was so much committed to god once donated a picture of lord Raghavendra standing before Brindavan to a temple. He was feeling proud when the framed picture was hanging on the wall of Brahmin temple. Later it was removed from temple as it was picture from lower caste people. The narrator and his friends also were in trouble and humiliated when they had been to Mantralaya. The upper-caste people chased them as they came to know they did not belong to upper-caste and did not wear sacred thread. In India, caste and religion has become a strong barrier, which has destroyed the lives of the dalits.

The position of dalit woman is even worse than the dalit men in Indian society. The dalit woman was doubly marginalised by the castiest society and even by the men folk. They were ill-treated and besieged in the name of god and religion. Malagatti in “An Eastman colour movie called Okuli” and in “My colony, my study” has delineated the realistic picture of the society where the dalit woman was socio-politically harassed. Okuli festival is an occasion where the dalit womenfolk were made to participate in a traditional game. The dalit women will be half-naked by removing ‘their blouses and wear andugachche, a lower garment worn above the kneecaps, hemmed tightly and tucked into waist band’ (Malagatti 42) and the men would splash the red and yellow coloured water with force on their body. This was done repeatedly without bothering about their bare body and falling sari. It was an entertainment for the lustful audience and for players by seeing the women’s ‘wet bodies, breasts and thighs’ (Malagatti 43). This game was held every year with the superstitious belief that for this there would be no rain, crops would be infected by pests and the village would be plagued by diseases. The dalit women were treated as prostitutes even if she had been the replica of the gods. The narrator gets rebellious when he finds that inhuman treatment is being meted out to the dalit women in the name of religion.

The chapter “My ex-beloved” is the lengthiest chapter, which exclusively deals with the narrator’s six years of love for a Brahmin girl. The narrator has given a transparent picture of his personal life. The narrator set two goals of his life when he started his research. His first important aim was to marry ‘her’ and the second was to work as a lecturer at least for one day in Karnataka University, Dharwad. The narrator was frustrated as he had parted from his lover after a long time of togetherness. She was like a lamp burned bright in his life. Before giving an end to their relationship she burnt bright, like the light emitting greater just before fading away. Before leaving him she exclaims her helplessness by saying, ‘Aravind... couldn’t you have been born at least as a Lingayat?’ (Malagatti 70). This is understood that the narrator was deserted just because he was not from an upper caste family. The chapter “Some girls who flirt with the future”, also refer to a young dalit student who fell in love with the Professor’s

daughter and eventually suffered. Many Professors in his university try to banish dalit students, especially the brilliant ones at that time. This is the reason why the dreams of dalit students get lost more often than blooming. In these terrible circumstances, only few come-up in life only bearing in mind 'their laurels by shedding their dignity and identity. This is the only way out!' (Malagatti 91). The autobiographer's father is one such person. In spite of all humiliations and harsh treatment, he became a school teacher. In "My Father's teaching job and the fifteenth of August", the autobiographer recalls the sincerity of his father as a school teacher and as a freedom fighter. His father believes that the independence to India will bring knowledge, freedom, love and respect for the dalits. But his desire was shattered when he faced insult of not letting him inside the classroom. However, he tried to convince them by showing the letter from the government; the other non-dalit teacher did not allow him. With much difficulty, he got permission to take class with a condition that he must not enter the temple; instead he has to teach them under the tree. Therefore, it is clear that still the autobiographer faces the curse of untouchability which his father experienced just after the first independence day of India.

The autobiographer has structured the text, where all facets of caste system can be looked through. The rules of caste system were not only applicable for dalits from the time of their birth but it was equally applicable for the animals. In the episode "The she-buffalo on heat and the he-buffalo after her", he depicts the mating of animals which is a natural process but was clogged because they were owned by certain castes. By this way, the caste system completely stops the physical union of the two buffalo's. The chapter titled "When Handya's hose was slashed", tells us a similar incident when a male dog owned by a dalit woman had physical union with a female bitch owned by a non dalit, the dalit woman kills her own dog when she comes to know about it. As Tharakeshwar aptly points out that "Caste society fails to stop the physical union for the time being, but ensures that the union is truncated and does not get institutionalised" (Malagatti 122).

Non-dalits always have the tendency of imitating the life of dalits in the matters of food and drink. And it is not a straightforward imitation. Malagatti had the bitter experience with his non-dalit friends who invited him for a cup of tea or for dinner to their houses. Whenever he happened to visit them, they start conversing regarding the caste. It is indirect way of practicing untouchability. In "Coffee over a cup of tea", the autobiographer expresses his mental conflict which is intolerable and humiliating for any dalit. The words of non-dalits are ironical when they utter words as they don't believe in caste discrimination and many of his dalit friends come home to have tea and food. The autobiographer wonders that rational and progressive thinkers of the modern space have a tendency to remind dalits of their positions in society. Sometimes it is reminded at a time when the narrator's plate was not taken into the kitchen for a

long time. The narrator remembers his grandmother's words, when a dalit touch an upper caste person's utensils, where

it had to be smeared with cow dung and burnt in fire. It would then be immersed in a solution of tamarind and salt. Afterwards, it would be immersed in cow's urine, and only then would it be placed along with the other vessels of the house. How much more pleasant is the touch of cow's urine than that of an untouchable human being! ... Earthenware would be given away to dalits with contempt. Or else, such earthen pots would be kept outside the door for such people, as if they were being kept for dogs. The same manner in which separate cups and saucers are kept for untouchables in hotels! (Malagatti 101-02).

Even though the dalits get good education and financial status, the caste discrimination does not stop. But the unpleasant incidents they faced 'remain black scars in the hearts of prudent dalits' (Malagatti 98).

In "Before the end..." Malagatti reveals that this autobiography is related only to a particular stage of his life, before he became employed. Hence forth, the main purpose of "the first volume" of his autobiography is to exemplify the complex power structure of the society which strangles the *dalit identity*.

Malagatti has used memory as a troupe while documenting the life-story which is also the act of conscious self. In this autobiography, the author has not glorified any individual person, instead emphasised on the community relationship with the sense of solidarity concerning social issues like village, family, caste, school, factory, urban streets, slums, etc. The personal narration assumes new scales of universality as it epitomises the tale of suffering and pain of each and every individual. It is a narrative in which the personal or subjective representation transcends the limits of in-betweenness and represents the collective consciousness of the community. It holds mirror to the entire world, entire community, their pain, suffering etc. The unique contribution of *Government Brahmana* as a text rests on the fact that it adopts the synchronic mode to present the greater reality of the dalits at the diachronic level. Besides occupying a space through identity based narrative, dalit autobiography provides an occasion for Dalit writers to gain constitutional rights and understanding of Dalit self and join hands with the Dalit community.

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Write/Right the Partition in 2016: Shobha Rao's *An Unrestored Woman and Other Stories*

Shreya Bhattacharji

The cartographical sport of Sir Cyril Radcliffe, the twin blood lines of 1947, dismembered a subcontinent to construct two nations —India and Pakistan. The sheer magnitude and monstrosity of the event can be assessed even by the official statistics: one million dead, twelve million displaced and converted into refugees, 75000 women abducted and raped. Official historical documentation attempts to reduce this holocaust to manageable figures, neatly overlooking the human quotient. The little histories of the displaced masses, the many contours of religion, gender, sexuality, caste and class, to name but a few, are subsumed by the master colonial/nationalist discourse.

Shobha Rao's debut short-story collection *An Unrestored Woman and Other Stories* (2016) foregrounds the violent disruption of millions of lives in the shifting borders of 1947 and its continued multiple malignant ramifications even today. The six paired stories in the collection span over a century, from the British Raj to contemporary times, and traverse India/Pakistan to the United States, Britain, Italy and even South Africa to explore the fault lines in this mass displacement of humanity — a new mother is trapped on the wrong side of the border; an imperial policeman witnesses the riot-death of his Sikh lover and leaves the continent haunted by rumors of homosexuality; a young cartographer fiddles with a small section of the Radcliffe Line with terrible consequences.

The first short story chosen for detailed study in this paper "The Lost Ribbon" reads almost like a monologue. The unnamed first person narrator, the mother, seems to be talking to her long dead daughter Noora. Noora's mother has killed Noora, her six week old baby girl, with her own two hands, some forty years back. The incident occurs somewhere in the Northwest Frontier or Punjab, in newly formed Pakistan.

Life has never been easy for any woman across cultures and continents. The "Me Too" campaign that is viral today can perhaps subsume cultures — spatially across the entire globe and temporally right down to mythic times, Draupadi and Sita being our own legendary examples. Yet, one has to admit that the Partition dealt a very hard blow, particularly to women on either side of the border. Noora's mother witnesses the torching of her family home with her parents trapped inside! And one of the torchers, responsible for her parents being burnt alive, abducts her. A single blink

of her eyes and literally her life changes forever: “He found me sitting on the stoop of our ruined house. I don’t know what I must’ve looked like but he said I was so covered in soot and ash that if I hadn’t blinked, he wouldn’t have known I was there.” (Rao 115)

She is abducted from the still bleeding divided Bengal, from someplace close to present day Kolkata. Two years down the lane, she has no idea about her exact location in Pakistan, shut as she has remained in a hut intentionally darkened by her abductor turned nocturnal rapist; the windows shuttered and the door padlocked from outside. The night her abductor rapes her for the first time, her heart dies within her fourteen year old self: “A scared and collapsed and quivering animal, curled into a ball, knowing only one thing: that nothing remained.”(Rao 108)

She has no wish to stay in Pakistan. And then comes Noora! With Noora comes light, comes love and the will to make a life for them both. And with Noora also comes the much awaited knock on the door and the choice to return to India. But Noora is not welcome in India. Literally and figuratively Noora has no space in her motherland, India. She is Pakistani. The social worker, herself a woman, explains in very clear terms that Noora has no place in India:

“The child,” the woman said. “She cannot come.”

“Where?”

“Back to India, of course.” . . .

“But why? She’s my daughter.”

“But she’s a citizen of Pakistan. She’s a Muslim.” (Rao 117-118)

A bewildered young mother takes a stand, of staying on in Pakistan: “Then I won’t come,” (Rao 118) but that is not to be. As the old soldier, leading the rescue team explains: “You must, beti. Now that we have found you, you must return to India.” (Rao 118) But the young mother is steadfast in her decision of being with her child: “I won’t . . . Not without my Noora.” (Rao 118) But once again the rescue team makes it very clear that the abducted woman has no agency in making the decisions of her own life. Two nation states, two patriarchal communities, at war with one other over religion, can resolve only one issue by mutual consensus — agency must not be granted to the abducted woman. She must be returned to the “correct” nation state and thereby the emasculated patriarchy on either side of the border would be re-masculated.

Under the Inter-Dominion Treaty of December 6, 1947, India and Pakistan had set up a joint machinery to rescue abducted women from each other’s territories. The Abducted Persons Recovery and Restoration Ordinance became an Act in 1949 and

the operation was known as the Central Recovery Operation. According to this Act, any woman seen to be living with, in the company of, or in a relationship with a man of the other religion, after March 1, 1947, was presumed to have been abducted. After this date, all marriages or conversions were seen as forced, and were not recognized by either of the two governments. No matter how much a woman protested, no matter there was the odd “real” relationship; women had no choice in this matter. (Butalia 144) At Partition, theoretically, every citizen could choose the nation he/she wished to belong to. If a woman had been abducted, however, she did not exercise such a choice. Over 30,000 women were recovered, 22,000 Muslim women from India and 8000 Hindu and Sikh women from Pakistan. (Butalia 163) As Butalia puts it: “If Partition was a loss of itself to the ‘other’, a metaphorical violation and rape of the body of the motherland, the recovery of women was its opposite, the regaining of the ‘pure’ . . . body of the woman . . . crucial for the State’s — and the community’s — self legitimation.” (Butalia 190)

Many women protested against this double uprooting. If one woman said: “Why should I return . . . Why are you particular to take me to India? What is left in me now of religion or chastity?”, another said: “I have lost my husband and have now gone in for another. You want me to go to India where I have got nobody . . . you do not expect me to change husbands everyday.” (Butalia 148) In such a volatile scenario, an abducted mother’s desire to stay on with her abductor was absolutely unacceptable. Motherhood itself was defiled and her sexuality was rendered both incomprehensible and unacceptable. (Butalia 190) And so Noora’s mother finds herself caught in the crossfire between two nations at war:

You have no choice,” she said. “There are governmental treaties we must follow.”

“What treaties? What governments?”

“Between India and Pakistan.”

“But this is *my child*.”

“She’s a child of Pakistan,” the old soldier said solemnly. “And you, my dear, are not.” (Rao 118)

The Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act, 1949 clearly included within the category “abducted person” a “male child under the age of sixteen years” or a “female of whatever age” and also “a child born to any such female” who “immediately before the 1st day of March, 1947, and before the 1st day of January, 1949, has become separated from his or her family and is found to be living with or under the control of any other individual or family . . .” (Web) However the Act is cleverly manipulated by prejudiced government functionaries and a naïve sixteen year old girl-mother is denied the opportunity of returning to India with her six week old child.

What choices then does Noora's mother have? Stay on with her daughter, year after year in the darkened hut with the padlocked door? Or escape with her daughter? Is escape even possible? And what chances of survival post escape would a young Hindu mother with a six week old Muslim daughter have in Pakistan or in India for that matter? What else can the hapless mother do? Leave the six week old daughter in the hands of her rapist and selfishly escape alone? And so with her own hands the mother extinguishes the light of her life: "I tightened my grip, I willed myself to close my eyes, to keep pressing. I felt the gentle curve of your windpipe, your brave and rumpled pulse, and I told myself, If you don't kill her, he will." (Rao 106)

The recovery process also ran into another stumbling block. The same families, who had filed reports and urged the government to recover their women, no longer wanted them back. Gandhi made repeated appeals: "I hear . . . the Hindus are not willing to accept back the recovered women . . . they have become impure. . . . this is a matter of great shame." Nehru also appealed to the public in 1948: ". . . there is an unwillingness . . . to accept those girls and women back These girls and women require our tender and loving care and their relatives should be proud to take them back" (Butalia 160)

A puzzled Lenny in *Ice-Candy-Man* questions her Godmother about the homelessness of Hamida, her newly-recruited Ayah. Her Godmother explains:

'Hamida was kidnapped by the Sikhs Once that happens, sometimes, the husband – or his family – won't take her back.'

'Why? It isn't her fault she was kidnapped!'

'Some folk . . . can't stand their women being touched by other men.' (Sidhwa 215)

The chilling shrieks and wails of such recovered women as Hamida would haunt Lenny a lifetime: "At night we hear them wailing, their cries verging on the inhuman." (Sidhwa 212) While abducted women, as Butalia puts it, "entered the realm of silence", women who committed suicide or were killed by families "entered the realm of martyrdom." (208)

If the recovered woman was alone, she was more easily accepted back. If she had children born of the mixed union, acceptance became very difficult; such children being constant reminders of the violation of the woman by a man of the other religion. Such a woman was given a choice; she could either stay with her children in an ashram or send the children to an orphanage and return to the family. Pregnant women also had a choice: either be sent to appointed places to deliver the children, or be "cleansed." The State financed such mass abortions at a time when abortion was actually illegal. (Butalia 161) But Noora's mother is not given the choice of staying in

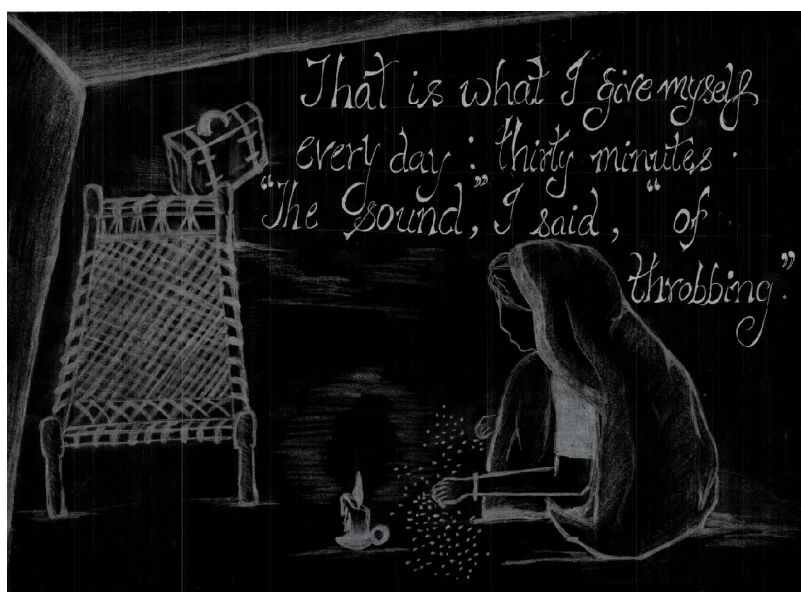
an ashram with Noora. Noora has to die, reminding one that prison statistics of contemporary India reveal that almost 99% women commit crimes in very compelling situations. Only 1% falls in the category of habitual offenders.

We next meet Noora's mother forty years later in a hostel for single women, near Khalsa College on Grand Trunk Road, somewhere in India, possibly living on a Government pittance. It seems that she has not been accepted back by her family and the larger community. For forty years she has lived with her painful secret closeted in her heart and perhaps she will die without revealing it. Every evening we find her counting lentils: "I'd gotten into the habit—every night, even now, even if the electricity has gone out and I have to do it by candlelight—of counting lentils. (Rao 111) Perhaps this is a classic example of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, the routine counting of lentils every evening: "No, there must be exactly nine hundred and eighty-six. Four hundred and eleven too. Three hundred and seventy-eight channa. And one hundred ninety-seven of my beloved masoor." (Rao 111) She does this to buy herself thirty minutes of peace from the throbbing of the cigarette burn inflicted by her rapist forty years back: "And though a cigarette burn can't talk it *can* say this: it is easier to look at death than at pain. In one the grief lingers and then passes with time. In the other, it is relentless. It is unerring. And it throbs—said the burn-like me." (Rao 121) The cigarette burn acts as the proverbial *last* straw that broke the *camel's back*. It is not her excruciatingly painful experience of rape but the incessant throbbing of the cigarette burn that makes her kill Noora.

Lenny's beloved Ayah, Shanta, in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man*, is abducted by Muslims, led by her rejected lover, Ice-Candy-Man himself. She is reduced to a vessel for sexual release in the "kothas" of Lahore, hers is a death-in-life existence. Ever since her rape at the age of fourteen, Noora's mother too is reduced to a death-in-life existence. It makes one reflect that while a man sacrifices his life, a woman sacrifices first her body, then her soul, and finally her very being in this brutal play of cartography. Cartography indifferently and brutally shreds women on both sides of the border.

Perhaps at this juncture it would not be amiss to make a mention of Umoja Uaso, the all women village, founded in 1990, near the town of Archers Post in Samburu County, 380 km from Nairobi, Kenya. This is a village created by survivors of sexual assault. In the early 1990s, there were over six hundred reports of Kenyan women having been raped by British soldiers. These women were abandoned by their husbands because they were considered to be "defiled." Some men drove the women out of their houses fearing they would contract sexually transmitted diseases from their raped wives.

These homeless women created Umoja. Rebecca Lolosoli, one of the founders



The painting above depicting Noora's mother counting lentils, is chalk-art on black chart paper, by Mr. Akinchan Xaxa and his sister Ms. Mable Xaxa. Akinchan is a V Semester student of Integrated Masters in English at the Central University of Jharkhand, Ranchi. An Elective Paper on Partition Literature is offered to the V Semester students of the University. The art-work is a fine example of the deep involvement of the whatsapp generation with the 1947 Partition of India and especially with Shobha Rao's engaging take on this holocaust, a ghost that refuses to be exorcised.

of Umoja, came up with the idea of creating a village for women when she was recovering after being beaten for speaking out. Eventually fifteen women came together to found the original village as a sanctuary for homeless survivors of violence against women.

Today the village has fifty women and two hundred children. The women run a primary school, a cultural center and a camping site for tourists visiting the adjacent Samburu National Reserve. They create and sell bead jewelry to benefit the village.

The second story "The Opposite of Sex" is the story of Mohan, a cartographer, the youngest member of the Calcutta Chapter of the Indian Geographical Society. Mohan is sent to a tiny village, ten miles south of the nearest town of English Bazar, to map the new border between India and East Pakistan. Mohan's is a silenced narrative of sexual abuse of a five year old child. Two consecutive nights, Mohan as a five year old child, is abused by his father's friend, a guest in the house. The child is also warned of terrible consequences if he reveals his painful secret. However his mother coaxes it out of him and within months his parents die in a car accident. Mohan grows up under the tutelage of a disciplinarian *Brahmachari* uncle believing himself to be responsible for the death of his parents.

In the tiny village, close to English Bazaar, Mohan sees Lalita, the daughter of a local landlord, with a bevy of village beauties at the village well. He is infatuated with Lalita, with what he thinks to be her unabashed happiness but later realizes to be her sex appeal. Deprived of parental love, affection and support, Mohan displaces onto Lalita the onus of all his unfulfilled desires. He considers her to be the source of happiness, the happiness of which he has remained deprived: "It was as if happiness in his life, even the witnessing of it, had taken to the shadows. One that he knew lived somewhere—maybe in tunnels dug deep beneath the streets on which he walked, or growing like a mold behind the walls of his flat—but it had not shown itself. Not to him. Not for a very long time. (Rao 124) He broods on the special thing that Lalita possesses but he doesn't and draws a remarkable conclusion: "He knew what Lalita had . . . that *he* didn't: she had sex. . . . what she had was the opposite of what he had. . . . He knew that the opposite of sex was fear." (Rao 126-127)

So incessant and irresistible is his pull towards Lalita that he decides to act. He visits her powerful landlord father who is surprisingly a polio cripple. The father asks Mohan a strange question. What does he see in Lalita? Mohan's "correct" reply that he sees in Lalita his future wife is summarily dismissed. The patriarchal landlord father views his daughter as fertile land: "I see dirt. Not just any dirt, Mr. Mohan, rich, black dirt. The kind where a mere whisper will sprout a seed. . . . The kind of dirt men were meant to plow." (Rao 129)

Mohan finds himself brushed aside like an irritating fly. Next thing he hears is that Lalita has been betrothed to a landlord from a neighbouring village, with a promised dowry of a thousand acres of land. Incited by his help Basu, the landless Mohan decides to use his brains. The lands of Lalita's father lie next to the river, the natural division between India and East Pakistan. The land is already bisected. Mohan has been sent just to map it and "make recommendations as to slight variations, if necessary." (Rao 131) Mohan decides to doctor the map; Lalita's father's lands would fall in East Pakistan while his house remained in India! Mohan is sure that without the dowry of a thousand acres Lalita's engagement would be called off. And then he, Mohan, "the landless intellectual, the compassionate savior" would volunteer to marry "the shamed, impoverished victim of a broken engagement." (Rao 131)

When the maps are released less than a month later, the unexpected happens. Lalita's father commits suicide. He refuses to live life as a landless man. Mohan thinks his plan was yielding rich dividends when he hears that Lalita's engagement has been called off. The dowry of a thousand acres was no longer there. But then much to Mohan's consternation, the groom-to-be offers to marry Lalita without the thousand acres. But then Lalita herself calls off the marriage; she no longer wishes to marry at all. Mohan visits Lalita and she makes it clear that she is not interested in any marriage of pity. Mohan looking at Lalita realizes that she has aged considerably in these few

days and feels the first pangsof conscience and guilt: “Maybe he should not have divided the land, maybe he should have kept it intact, and let her marry that young man. Maybe he should have let them be young together.” (Rao 134) And he realizesthat he has lost her forever: “Mohan closed his eyes and thought of a map. Any map. All those lines, hiding all those lives: strung between us like hissing electric wire.” (Rao 135)

But the damage had already been done. The “quiet farming village” had metamorphosed overnight into “an angry village.” (Rao 135) A Muslim family of six was slaughtered, the Muslim owned sundries shop was looted. Mohan’s boss Mr. Debnath “D6” comes on “progress review” to ask a single pertinent question: “Why did you move the border?” (Rao 136) At a visit to the border the next morning, D6 warns Mohan of his impending trial for treason. Although D6 personally feels that Mohan should be actually tried for murder: “But human life has always been worth less than land, hasn’t it?” (Rao 139)

The two return to Mohan’s house to be attacked by an angry Hindu mob. As Mohan succumbs, the two narratives of the adult and the five year old coalesce. The machete of communal frenzy is subsumed by the more powerful machete of child sexual abuse and we realize that Mohan had already died at the tender age of five.

To conclude, Rao’s remarkable collection of 2016 seems an attempt to unearth certain painful narratives from seven decades of colonial/nationalist sedimentation and thereby both write/right the Partition in 2016. Delving deep into the collective subconscious of a deeply wounded subcontinent, Shobha Rao’s “little histories” of the “peripheral people” seek to foreground an intentional/unintentional conspiracy of selective amnesia indulged in by all — perpetrators, victims, eyewitnesses, and historians both White and Brown.

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The Colonial/Civilised Pervert: The Play of Masochism and Self on the Periphery in Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*

Pabitra Kumar Rana

“Sexual dynamics crucially underpinned the whole operation of British empire and Victorian expansion.”
— Ronald Hyam

One of the bedrocks of British colonialism in Asia and Africa is the supposed civilisational superiority of the British over the colonised peoples, and one of the founding principles of their civilisational superiority is their sexual ethics. Colonial discourse entailed the binary distinction between the sexual sanctimoniousness of the coloniser and the sexual laxity of the colonised. In Europe's self-conception, the opposition between the Occident as centre and the Orient as periphery was crucial as it is the difference that was the ideological foundation of colonialism. Europe's study and production of knowledge of the East were not objective, but, as Edward Said has pointed out in *Orientalism*, “was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted binary opposition between the familiar (Europe, the West, ‘us’) and the strange (the Orient, the East, ‘them’)” (45). Literary and cultural productions of Europe posited the oriental peoples as irrational, barbaric, sensual and lazy; the Europe, on the other hand, is “civilization itself, with its sexual appetites under control and its dominant ethic that of hard work” (Loomba, 45). Sexual behaviour of the coloniser was deemed as pivotal in maintaining the supposed racial superiority of them. In *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (1995) Ann Laura Stoler contends that an implicit ‘racial grammar’ which was circulated through empire was inextricably bound with sexual practices of the colonisers. In Stoler's analysis, regulation of sexuality and reproduction was at the heart of fixing colonial privilege and its boundaries. She points out Michel Foucault's analysis of the key process of modernity in Europe (as analyzed in *History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1) ignored the ways in which colonial experience were complicit in these processes. In *The History of Sexuality* (Vol. 1) Foucault engages with the strategies of nineteenth-century European sexuality. Foucault examines why, despite the attempts to hide and repress sexuality from public domain, there had been a huge proliferation of discourse of sex. For Foucault, sexuality is not mere biological drive or social restriction of it to be overcome by individual, but a “dense transfer point” of power, inscribed with “instrumentality” (103). Foucault did not subscribe to the notion that repression was

the cause of its silences and proliferations. Rather, Foucault was interested in why did the “truth” of sex become an important component of bourgeois self and social order. The history of sexuality, for Foucault, is the history of, as Stoler notes, “patterned discursive incitements and stimulations that facilitated the penetration of social and self-disciplinary regimes into most intimate domains of modern life” (3). The discourses of sex set the criteria of bourgeois identity.

Scholars have found parallels between management of sexuality and management of empire. The Victorian project of ruling the colonies involved the task of ruling both body and mind. Studies have shown that deployment of sexual policies and practices were central to colonial order of things. Stoler argues that the emergence of bourgeois sexuality did not happen in the confinement of Europe, rather it originated in colonies due to bourgeois insistence on the distinction of race. Stoler writes:

Europe’s eighteenth-century discourses on sexuality can—indeed must—be traced along a more circuitous imperial route that leads to nineteenth-century technologies of sex. They were refracted through the discourses of empire and its exigencies, by men and women whose affirmations of a bourgeois self, and the racialized contexts in which those confidences were built, could not be disentangled. (7)

She further argues that discourses of sexuality not only set the boundary of bourgeois self but also fix the European moral parameters. Within the vocabulary of bourgeois civility in colonies, self-control and self-discipline became the defining parameters. Interestingly, she also asserts that these parameters, though “affirmed in the ideal family milieu, were often transgressed by the sexual, moral and religious contaminations in those same European colonial Homes” (8). Colonies became porous sites which offered Europeans the scope of transgressing the rigid sexual code ostensibly devised by themselves. The rise of bourgeois order in early nineteenth century, that is, in the beginning of modern age, is inextricably linked with racially-spurred assertions of sexual practices of the colonisers.

So, modern notions of self and sex are intimately connected to the rise of bourgeois, and by extension, to expansion and consolidation of empire. Taking the clue from Stoler, Paul Gillen and Devleena Ghosh postulate that modern ideas about gender roles (how to be a proper gentleman or lady), domestic management (thrifty and efficient housewifery) or middle or working class respectability (sexual purity and maintaining distance from natives) were experimented in the colonies before being exported to imperial centres. In fact, modern discourses of sexuality and gender have been constructed by conflict and interplay between colonies and Europe. Colonial societies were obsessed with regulation of sexuality which was fraught with colonial

legitimacy. They write:

Colonial societies displayed Foucauldian patterns in their enthusiasm for finding and controlling internal enemies who destabilised the colonial power structure. These ‘deviants’ transgressed bourgeois norms such as sexual control, domesticity and racial purity. Curiously, in this paradigm, Europeanness appeared weak and in constant fear of degeneration or ‘going native’, demanding self-discipline and conformity to bourgeois sexual mores, in contrast to the powerful appeal of ‘native’ biological and cultural contamination. (186-7)

That is why the education of desire, that is, to control and channelise it in productive direction, got premium importance in colonial ideology. But things did not happen always as they are envisioned. Epitome of manly righteousness and female virtues prove to be epitome of debauchery and vice.

As a novelist, Amitav Ghosh is always preoccupied with individual predicament in the context of larger historical events. As most of his novels deal with the European imperialism since eighteenth century, his characters are both Europeans and non-Europeans whose destiny are inevitably caught in maelstrom of colonialism, and colonialism was deeply implicated in ethical concerns. As a postcolonial writer (though he rejects any such categories), he raises serious questions regarding the ethics of colonialism. In an interview with Chitra Sankaran, Ghosh clarifies his take on ethics:

I mean a writer reflects continuously on ethics, on morality, the state of things in the world. Some do it by, as it were, reflecting on the immoral [laughs]. Some do it by reflecting upon conscious ethics or conscious morality. But I think it’s really impossible for people to pretend that writing does not address the issue of “who are you,” “what is right conduct, what is wrong conduct.” I don’t mean to say that writing is necessarily prescriptive... I don’t think that is what it is at all—all that would be much more like philosophy or something and I would not be drawn to that because I don’t think I am in a position to be telling people what they should be doing, as a rule. But I’m very drawn to ethical predicaments—the difficulty of ethical, moral predicaments... (2012:13)

That is what he did also in the *Ibis trilogy*, especially in *Sea of Poppies* and *The Flood of Fire*: he unmasked the ethical hypocrisy of the colonisers, without becoming prescriptive. His *Ibis Trilogy* deals with, inter alia, sexual life of Mr. and Mrs. Burnham, two self-certified doyens of civilisational morality and values. The Burnhams are presented as powerful bourgeois colonial elites whose fortune is built by illegal opium

trade under the protection of the East India Company. Mr. Burnham is the spokesman of the legitimacy of colonialism and Free Trade. In fact, he views both colonial occupation of the East and opium trade there by the Europeans as a religious project, God's command. Mrs. Burnham is presented as an epitome of Western women. Being a memsahib, she constructs her public image as virtuous, dainty, humanitarian. But both of them turn out to be fake personalities whose real selves contradict their public images. Mrs. Burnham indulges in sexual act with the mulatto sailor Zachary Reid in the pretext of curing him of onanism. Mr. Burnham lusts after Paulette (a young, orphaned white girl whom he professes to protect) while teaching her lessons of the Bible. He derives masochistic pleasure by being beaten severely on his ass by Paulette. He goes to the extent of ejaculating on the floor with the intensification of his perverse pleasure as Paulette strikes him (because of his pleading) as hard as possible with a broom. This article only takes up the case of Mr. Burnham as narrated in *Sea of Poppies* in order to understand Ghosh's critique of colonial sexuality whose structures were simultaneously invoked and violated by the colonisers themselves, exposing how their civilised outer self is undermined by their perverse inner self, and how they were living in the fear of being marginalised despite all their wealth and power.

II

In the trilogy, it is Mr. Benjamin Burnham who is the model for what a European can accomplish in colonies. An opium merchant, a business tycoon and a preacher of the universality of Free Trade, he is the powerful bourgeois for whom colonialism has opened the means of amassing huge profit by illegal trading of opium. He is the owner of the ship Ibis after which the trilogy is named. Born in a Liverpool timber merchant family, he had been such a brawler and trouble-maker that his family had shipped him out as a 'guinea-pig' at the age of ten. By working as an assistant to prison's chaplain at Port Blair, he acquired both faith and education, and then sailing between America, Africa and England, he learned the ways of the world. At the age of nineteen, on a China-bound ship he came in contact with a famous Protestant missionary who found him the job as a clerk with trading firm of Magniac & Co., and he rapidly learned the knowhow of Indo-China opium trade. He aspired to be a nabob in his own right, and have a place the Calcutta opium auction which he obtained soon from the East India Company. By coming over to Calcutta in 1817 he rented an office on the Strand from the Raja of Raskhali, and very soon made huge fortune, first by transporting Indian convicts to places like Penang, Bencoolen, Port Blair and Mauritius, and then by securing a position to bid in the auctions of the East India Company. When young and penniless Mr. Burnham came to the old Zaminder of Raskhali for an office, the old Raja was not only kind enough to defer the rent for one year, but decided to invest – having seen a white mouse while talking with Mr. Burnham and interpreting it as auspicious sign from Lord Ganesha – in the opium business of Mr. Burnham. The

investment brought huge profit in every year for the Raja whose relatives and acquaintances also gradually invested in the opium business via him. The share in opium business brought fortune and ruin to the Raskhali estate as in 1837 the Chinese ban on opium trade resulted in huge loss and the Raja was in huge loan to Mr. Burnham. But by then, Mr. Burnham has established himself as a leading merchant of Calcutta, built a huge palace in Garden Reach, married the daughter of a Brigadier's daughter, and an extremely powerful person among the White community in Calcutta. He is evidently a self-made man; but he builds his business on illegal trading which he boasted of as God's work. The interesting thing of Mr. Burnham is that whatever he does, he justifies it on the rhetoric of God's command. When he meets Neel, the impoverished son of the old Raja, he asserts that "Merchants like myself are but servants of Free Trade, which is as immutable as God's commandments" (117), and moralises that if England has to go to the extent of war with China for ban in opium sale, it would not be for opium, but for the principle for freedom of Free Trade which is "a right conferred on Man by God" (115). This rhetoric of Christianity permeates every decision, behaviour and action of Mr. Burnham. He embodies the notion that colonialism itself is a very holy, religious and sanctimonious project which has borne the torch of civilisation in the savage East.

As a self-certified representative of superior race, Mr. Burnham poses as a charitable person to the poor whites in Calcutta, especially helpless young girls. He tends to exemplify what is it to do God's work: to sell opium in Eastern countries to relieve the people from the torture of despotic rulers, to fight for the universality of Free Trade, to confiscate the property of Indian zaminder by convicting him as a criminal, to trade in transporting the convicts, and most importantly, to teach wayward young girls biblical lessons. It is in this spirit he gives shelter to Paulette Lambert, eighteen year old daughter of late French botanist Pierre Lambert who had been in charge of the Botanical Garden in Calcutta. When, after the death of her father, Paulette came to live in Bethel (the palatial house of Mr. Burnham in Garden Reach, Calcutta), she found herself ill at ease with everything; she is unaccustomed to the luxurious living and the consciousness of what is it to be a memsahib. Though by birth Paulette is a European, but by heart she is a Bengali: she loves wearing saree, eating Bengali food and talking in Bengali. At Bethel, Paulette's discomfiture is evident in every little thing like bathing, clothing, and talking properly. It is a place where the master and the mistress have exemplified themselves as ideal to be emulated by others. Paulette discovers "that at Bethel, the servants, no less than the masters, held strong views on what was appropriate for Europeans, especially memsahibs" (123). They sneered at her for her failure to dress or speak like pukka memsahib. But what ostensibly scandalized Mr. Burnham about Paulette not merely her ineptitude in external mannerism, but her ignorance of Scripture, and consequently, her non-Christian

worldview. Being the daughter of a naturalist, the world of Nature – its flora and fauna – had been to her a sort of spiritual sustenance. It is her ignorance in religious matters that prompted, says Paulette later to Zachary Reid aboard Zodu's boat on the Ganges in a late night, to take personal charge of her instruction despite his busy schedule. Awestruck as she was, she could hardly believe that her patron and benefactor would take so much trouble for her improvement. Mr. Burnham always stressed the importance of penitence and chastisement, and decided to teach her lessons on these concepts.

Thus started his biblical classes. The classes were held – like the Mrs. Burnham's classes of Zachary as narrated later in *Flood of Fire* – in secrecy, in the evening, after dinner when the house was quiet, the servants were at rest and Mrs. Burnham had retired to her bedchamber after a dose of opium. Mr. Burnham deemed such a time and such solemn atmosphere suitable for “contemplation and penitence” (298). He would draw the curtain and latch the door fast to prevent, apparently, any kind of disturbance from outside in the work of righteousness. The room would be dark except the light of the flames of a bunch of candles placed over the high lectern where the Bible lay open. Mr. Burnham would present himself in a possessed, frenzied mood with shinning eyes and glowing beard. In such a hushed ambience he would impart the biblical lesson he had already chosen for the day. The passages chosen by Mr. Burnham would be ones on penitence, and he would read them in deep voice, “like a mighty waterfall, breaking upon the silence of a great valley” (298). Proceeding lesson after lesson, one day they came to a chapter of Hebrews which inculcates the imperative of chastening in a person's life: “If you endure chastening, God dealeth with you as sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if he be without chastisement, whereof all are pertakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons” (299). Having read the passage with great emotion, Mr. Burnham knelt down beside Paulette who was already dismayed, and asked her in the most severe manner whether she was without chastisement. The question sent a tremor down her spine and she confessed her lack of chastisement. He asked her whether she wants to learn of chastisement, and though horrified at the thought of being chastised by so big and powerful a man, she mustered all her courage and declared herself ready to receive the blows. But then came the surprise. Mr. Burnham told Paulette that it is she whom he will not chastise, rather it is he who desires to be chastised by her. Amazed and nervous she was, but she agreed to obey her benefactor, and then started the act. He would assume a strange posture by lowering his face to the feet of seated Paulette, cupping her slippers in his hand and raising his “poop-deck” (i.e. his ass) high in air. Then he would ask her to strike with her hand severely on his ass, and he would plead Paulette to exert all her strength to strike him. As her striking would be harder, so more intense would be his pain-pleasure, and he would bite and suck her slippers, making them wet.

After each session, instead of showing symptoms of pain, he would be so pleased as to tickle her under her chin. But he would strictly forbid her to reveal anything of the classes to anyone as that would surely undo the lessons learnt.

Thus, Mr. Burnham turns out to be a masochist who gains pleasure from being beaten. He continues the game, even making it more severe. In one of the following classes he told Paulette that her hands were not sufficient instrument for his punishment, and he wishes to be beaten by a sweeper's broom (i.e. the Indian "jhata" or "jharus") which, according to him, is a reminder of the fallen nature of Man and the sinfulness of our bodies. Paulette had to procure it with great difficulty given the curiosity of the servants, and Mr. Burnham's joy knew no bounds in anticipation of his impending oppression. He chose the Biblical passage carefully: "And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword" (302), and having put the jhata in her hand, exhort her to strike his ass: "I am the city and this your sword. Strike me, smite me, burn me with your fire" (302). Though he would squirm and writhe in pain, and Paulette would be very afraid for having seriously injured him, he would plead to go on harder. With the increase in the lashing, there seems to be an increase in the orgasmic pleasure he gets from the beating. Paulette recounts the horrific incident to bemused Zachary:

So I swung back my arm and lashed him with the jhata, using all my strength—which, you may be sure, is not inconsiderable—until finally he moaned and his body went slack on the floor. What horror! I have killed him for sure. So I leant down and whispered: "Oh poor Mr Burnham—are you all right?" Vaste was my relief, you can be sure, when he stirred and moved his head. But yet he would not rise to his feet, no, he lay flat on the floor and squirmed over the parquet like some creature of the soil, all the way to the door. "Are you hurt, Mr. Burnham? I inquired, following him. "Have you broken your back? Why do you lie thus on the floor? Why do you not rise? He answered me with a moan: "All is well, do not worry, go to the lectern and read again the lesson." I went to obey him, but no sooner was my back turned than he leapt nimbly to his feet, undid the latch and hurried away up the stairs. I was retracing my steps to the lectern when I saw on the floor a curious mark, a long, wet stain, as if some thin, damp creature had crawled over the parquet. (*Sea of Poppies*, 302-3)

Little did she know what the stain was, and she screamed by mistaking it as a snake which have intruded into the room. She cried out "*Sap!Sap!*" just as a servant entered the room and asked him to hunt the serpent which has entered the room from

the jungle. It took a while for Paulette to understand what the stain actually was even after the servant pointed out to her, after examining the stain on the floor, that “This was not made by a serpent of the jungle; it is a mark of the snake that lives in Man” (303). Innocent as she was, she could not imagine that such an imposing and overtly religious-minded man like Mr. Burnham can be a pervert who would derive sexual pleasure to the point of ejaculating by being beaten by a young woman like her. But “pervert” from whose point of view? One should not be summarily criticised for being on the wrong side of history. The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary defines perversion as “behaviour that most people think is not normal or acceptable, especially when it is connected with sex.” In his book *What are Perversions?* Sergio Benvenuto describes perversion as “essentially a moral judgement: a reproach, an insult or a slander” and “like every moral judgement, it varies according to customs of every epoch and culture” (xiii). In fact, until the end of nineteenth-century, the only legitimate sexuality was that of a married couple with the aim of procreation. Perversion or the psychological term “paraphilia” implies, at its simplest, sexual behaviour that deviates from norm, be it religious, legal, or customary. The norm should be that of contemporary society. Some of the forms of perversions identified by nineteenth-century psychiatrists are exhibitionism, voyeurism, fetishism, paedophilia, masochism, sexual sadism etc. Other forms of perversions are adultery, homosexuality etc. Mr. Burnham’s masochistic transgression of the much-hyped colonial morality exposes him to be a pervert under the mask of pious man. One is reminded that in colonial order of things, the Europeans are represented not as perverts but as bearer of light and progress.

III

In any perverse act the subject gains sexual enjoyment while the other subject is only involved as an instrument to that enjoyment. Perversion does not intend to use the other as an object but to use the other as subject, making her a “subjective object.” That is why Benvenuto claims that “The subjectivity of the other is an essential component of perverse acts” (3). For example, the masochist – unlike the sadist who enjoys the pain of his victim but does not assail objects, rather strives to make the subject suffer – “seems satisfied with having an accomplice: but it is the anger and contempt of the Other that the perverse staging wishes to evoke” (3). Here the “other” subject has two implications: firstly, “the actual other”, the concrete person’s subjectivity that the masochist uses for his enjoyment, and secondly, what Jacques Lacan calls “Other” which is not the actual person, but a virtual otherness, a pure “position.” The Lacanians think that perversions are means to secure the enjoyment of the Other. In every act of perversion, the primary subject must be an ethically split self: the pervert requires the other’s subjectivity, but he requires it only for his own enjoyment. Because of the split in the ego, the primary subject fantasises the other to become the Other to fulfill his enjoyment which bound him with the enjoyment of the Other. Thus the

masochist needs the Other's rage and strictness. But as the Other does not exist in the literal sense, the masochist wishes the other to play the role of the Other. Benvenuto contends:

Indeed, the masochist derives enjoyment from giving enjoyment to the sadistic Other, who punishes and humiliates him, even if this Other is not present, so to speak: a woman who lends herself to masochistic mise-en-scene embodies the Other, just as an actress embodies a character. (6)

As it has already been pointed out, the punishing woman in masochism is no more than an instrument to the pervert for whom she must play the part of the Other. So the actual woman is supposed by the masochist to be an actress. But the irony is that that does not happen always. It is the gap between the other and the Other that often exposes the perversion of the subject. Thus, though Mr. Burnham forbids Paulette to disclose anything of his humiliation by her for his upliftment, she reveals it to Zachary in order to seek his help to find a passage for Mauritius. She refuses to play the role of the Other. However, from another ironical angle, Paulette fulfills Mr. Burnham's masochistic desire to the core, for a masochist desires an "intransigent woman", but does not desire to satisfy her desire. Indeed, his partner's desire is not an end for him, but for a means to him to procure hedonistic pleasure.

Mr. Burnham's desire to be punished and humiliated by a woman reveals his true subjectivity; he is a masochist under the guise of an imperial humanitarian and pious christian. The term masochism was coined by nineteenth-century Austro-German psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1840-1902) with reference to Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, a 19th century Austrian novelist in whose works men are humiliated and tormented by beautiful women. Krafft-Ebing defined masochism as "the wish to suffer pain and be subjected to force" (1983, p. 27). A masochist, according to Krafft-Ebing, "in sexual feeling and thought is controlled by the idea of being completely and unconditionally subjected to the will of a person of the opposite sex; of being treated by this person as by a master, humiliated and abused"(p. 28). The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) of American Psychiatric Association looks at masochism as a form of mental illness. Freud also viewed masochism as perversion and identified nonsexual forms of masochism. In his article "Sexual Modernity in the Works of Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Albert Moll" Harry Oosterhuis argues, by taking clue from the works of Krafft-Ebing and Albert Moll, that the notion of sexual modernity entails "that sexuality is a powerful, continuous, compulsive and irresistible force in human life, which is dangerous as well as wholesome, and with which everybody has to come to terms." Different forms of non-conforming sexuality which are often categorized as perversions are seen as modes of modern sexuality,

and in the notion of modern sexuality, the focus is shifted from procreation to pleasure. Though Oosterhuis' proposition that modern notion of sexuality is liberating for the self is tenable to a large extent, it contradicts modernity's emphasis on self-control. Sexuality becomes paradoxical when it is appropriated for the purpose of exemplifying the modern notion of bourgeois self but is inverted from inside. But one thing is undeniable: with the advent of nineteenth-century bourgeois modernity, sexuality came to be dominating component of self and identity. Roy F. Baumeister has argued in his *Masochism and the Self* (1989) that sexual masochism is the original, prototypical form of masochism which is a pattern of sexual behaviour that "associates sexual pleasure with one or more of the following three features: receiving pain; relinquishing control through bondage, rules, commands, or other means; and embarrassment or humiliation"(3). What interests Baumeister about masochism is its paradoxical relation with self. He notes that the self is developed to avoid pain, but the masochist seeks pain; the self strives for control but the masochist surrenders; and, the self aims to maximize its esteem, but the masochist willingly desires to be humiliated. Baumeister contends that masochism is a mode of escape from self. By "self" he means the body and a set of cultural signifiers that are elaborated around it. Social and interpersonal roles, commitments and obligations, memberships in groups and institutions, personal values and goals, personal history, concepts of one's own personality, and conceptions of one's potential identity—all these are added on to the body to form the notion of self. Masochism is an escape from self in the sense that it bares the self to its essence, stripping it of its formal identity. Baumeister further argues that masochism is a deconstruction of the self in that it "contradicts and undermines the meaningful definitions of self, replacing these with mere awareness of the body" (30). In other words, it prevents higher level of self awareness and promotes lower level of self awareness. The higher level of self determines one's societal roles, one's career, one's family roles, one's belief in abstract values, one's social and institutional obligations etc. Masochism systematically suspends this self and reduces an individual to his inner self. Baumeister writes:

Masochism thus prevents the person from being aware of many meaning aspects of his or her self-concept. Awareness is confined to a minimal, relatively meaningless, deconstructed version of self. The self is stripped of its civilized, human properties, and it ceases to be a complex, symbol-using, decision-making, valued entity. It is reduced to a body or even a mere thing. Masochism replaces identity with body. (31)

This is what happens to Mr. Burnham. The masochistic episodes with Paulette strip him of his outer self and reveals his true self which is a pervert self. This stripping takes on an added significance in case of him as he has always prided on his higher

self. All his boastings – his theory of the universality of Free Trade, the necessity of opium trade in China to relieve people from the pain of living under a tyrant, his altruism in helping poor whites in India by giving them shelter and food, his preoccupation to teach people lessons of the *Bible* – turn out to be empty mouthing, pretensions and role-playing. A masochist is a peripheral figure in Europe's self-representation in empire. The strict opposition between the sexual restraint of the European and the excess of the Indian is invoked to be dismantled. He turns out to be an "other" to himself, alienated from his social self. The paradox of Mr. Burnham is that he is at the centre of power and is anxious of being thrown out of the boundary of legitimacy. His sexual excess undermines his positionality of power and threatens to throw him into periphery. His worst fear of being discovered of his perversion shows how he is both powerful and peripheral figure at the same time.

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Subversion of History in Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey*: A Study

Ujjwal Kr. Panda

Rejection of the veracity and authenticity of the mainstream history or the existing historical narrative has been an important postmodernist strategy. An empirical and sceptical appreciation of the national history to be fabricated or made up version of the ground reality in the hand of the elitist, dominant and politicised academia leads the postmodernist theorists of historiography to reexamine and rewrite history. This reinterpretative urge becomes all the more acute for a person of marginal subject-position in the postcolonial context because he/she has to postulate his own version of history for his community which is twice removed from reality being represented first by the colonizers and then by the people of his/her own country belonging to socio-cultural majority. In the present paper I would like show how this ethnocentric urge to give a separate voice to the marginal and diasporic Parsi community of the post-independence Bombay leads Rohinton Mistry to rewrite and reexamine the mainstream Indian history (both colonial and postcolonial) from the perspective of a cultural outsider in his 1991-novel, *Such a Long Journey*.

Despite his fame as one of the most successful Canadian writers over the last 25 years, Rohinton Mistry writes very little about Canada itself. Instead he almost exclusively concentrates on India, and, on a more accurate level, on the plight of the Parsi Community living in the west coast of the sub-continent, especially in Mumbai. Mistry can be deemed as a writer of the Indian Diaspora as he lives in Canada but at the same time his subject-position is diasporic in India also because of his being a Parsi Zoroastrian whose ancestors were forced into exile by the Islamic conquest of Iran. During British colonial rule the marginal Parsis in India began to participate increasingly in international trade and shipping. John R. Hinnells and Alan Williams in the introduction of their edited book *Parsis in India and the Diaspora* (2007) write-

The English sought to attract migrants and to encourage minorities, and accordingly they offered freedom of religion and equal justice before the law: various minorities, such as the Jains and the Parsis, chose to live under the new regime. Bombay was, therefore, from its early days, a cosmopolitan island on which Parsis flourished, first as middlemen in trade, then as independent traders. They also changed from a rural environment to what became an urban setting. (1)

But Parsis had to pay for this bonhomie with the British rulers in the post-independence period. In the highly racist and communal politics of postcolonial India the Parsi image has been violently downgraded by the dominantly hegemonic cultural politics. In *Such a Long Journey* this minority status of the diasporic Parsi community has been brilliantly captured by Mistry through the life of Gustad Noble, a devout Parsi living in Bombay of the 1970s. Gustad works in a bank as a clerk. He is a devoted family man and his faith in Zoroastrianism and love for his community and friends remains firm. But the life of Gustad becomes extremely vitiated and his diasporic and resultantly marginalised Parsi identity is continually tested through a series of adverse circumstances which are personal but undoubtedly attuned to the general socio-political milieu of India during the Indo-Pak war of 1971. Peter Morey in his book, *Rohinton Mistry comments -*

Such a Long Journey has been described as ‘both history and fabulation’, and there are certainly elements of the text’s treatment of documented national events which appear to propel it towards the category of ‘historiographic metafiction’ described by Linda Hutcheon, where history and fiction are intertwined, and the boundaries between them blurred to allow a new perspectives to emerge. (92)

The fictive canvas of the plot corresponds with the contemporary Indian socio-political panorama and the novel becomes in a way a kind of Jamesonian “national allegory”. From this point of view the mysterious disappearance of Major Bilimoria from Khododad building has a clear resemblance with the infamous Nagarwala case of the 1970s that rocked the ethnic ego of the Parsis. Santawna Halder in her book *Rohinton Mistry’s Such a Long Journey: A critical Study* comments -

It may not be an exaggeration to observe that the Nagarwala incident was the basis of the novel. During the regime of Indira Gandhi in India, one Parsi gentleman Mr. Nagarwala was accused of imitating Indira Gandhi’s voice while talking over the phone to the chief cashier of a nationalized bank from where he took sixty lakhs rupees presumably for the fighters in Bangladesh. Mr. Nagarwala was pronounced guilty by the court and the entire Parsi community felt shocked and disgraced. Rohinton Mistry’s pride for his community, which has been maintaining a high moral standard and which had secured a high moral standard and which had secured a prestigious position in the past, got hurt and he decided to take revenge on Indira Gandhi through his fiction. No one has any doubt that Major Bilimoria in the novel, the Parsi

gentleman working for the RAW, is none but Mr. Nagarwala. Bilimoria is accused in the way Mr. Nagarwala was accused, and Mistry gives Bilimoria a scope to justify himself when he arranges a meeting between Gustad and Bilimoria in jail. (16)

Actually the tragedies of Gustad's life is peculiarly attuned to his feeling of being a cultural outsider. The post-independence India is a country torn by wars with its neighbours and Gustad's life is presented in relation to these wars. The Indo-China war was an excruciating experience for Gustad as it was an eventful year in his life. At his personal level he met with a serious accident, his daughter was born, and in social sphere - "riot in the city - curfew and lathicharge and burning buses everywhere. What a dreadful year 1962 had been" (9), thinks Gustad. To top it all, the year was one of debacle and betrayal for India as a nation -

And such a humiliating defeat, everywhere people talking of nothing but the way Chinese had advanced, as though the Indian army consisted of tin soldiers. (9)

It led to the pricking of bubbles of good many myths, including Nehru's famous slogan, "Hindi-Cheene bhai-bhai". The government's "incompetency for sending brave Indian soldiers, with outdated weapons and summer clothing, to die in the Himalayas at Chinese hands"(10) has been pointed out. Many donated goods for the jawans had turned up for sale in Chor Bazaar and Nul Bazaar and were available at roadside stall. According to Gustad corruption was rampant and the Indo-China war was enough to demythicise Nehru as a great visionary and humanist. He was then a heartbroken man who could never recover the betrayal of Chou-En-Lai and -

He resigned himself to political intrigues and internal squabbles, although signs of his tyrannical ill-temper and petulance had emerged even before the China war. (11)

His failure to forgive his son-in-law, Feroze Gandhi for exposing the scandals in the government and his almost obsessive wish for his daughter's claim as the next Prime Minister characterise the fag end of Nehru's stint.

The memories of Indo-Pak war of 1965 also recapture the memory of Lal Bahadur Shastri. "Short in height but tall in brain is our Lal Bahadur", Dr. Paymaster used to tell his patients. His adept leadership helped India win the war only in 21 odd days. His death on the night of Tashkent Declaration, according to Gustad, is also a part of this post-independence corrupted Indian politics.

Again the novel fictionalises Gustad Noble's tragic life against the backdrop of Indo-Pak war of 1971. Mistry ironically refers to black papers used to cover the windows of Khodadat building for the blackouts of 1962 which had not been removed.

In this context, Mistry also demythicises Mrs. Gandhi's "Mother India" image. Towards the end of the novel when Gustad goes to Delhi to meet Jimmy Bilimoria at a hospital the severely ill friend tells how Indira usurped national power for her own purpose -

But I thought, everything is controlled by her. RAW, the courts, broadcasting ... everything is in her pocket, all will be covered up. (278)

or,

It drove me crazy to think of all this. But I decided - if they can profit from the sixty lakh, why not us? Her son, his Maruti car factory, whatever they use it for... we can also use some. (279)

During her time India had turned into a fallen country when deep rooted corruption became the order of the day. Again Mrs. Gandhi's decision to nationalize the banks the monopoly of the Parsis in the banking sector ended. This led to another mass migration of the Parsis from one country to another - this time mostly to the U. S. and Canada.

Moreover, this sense of political and national marginalisation intermingles with a sense of being on the margins religiously and ethnically. The diasporic Parsi identity here suffers from a sense of transcendence of belonging typical to religious minorities. Gustad's friend, Malcolm used to remind him that "we are minorities in a nation of Hindus" (23). He also considered beef as a privilege of the minorities -

"The modernized Hindus eat mutton. Or chicken, if they want to be more fashionable. But we will get our protein from their sacred cow. ... It is healthier because it is holier." (23)

But now in a Bombay where communal tension is unleashed by the fundamentalist Hindutva workers of Shiv Sena the Parsis began to feel alienated in this country -

No future for the minorities, with all these fascist Shiv Sena politics and Marathi language nonsense. It was going to be like the black people in America (55)

Towards the end of the novel this sense of marginalisation bursts into a bitter irony and the mainstream national history is violently satirised. It is a strange country where the wall of the ghettoized Khodadat building used as a public urinal by the passers-by turns to a religious shrine after some figures of gods are painted on it by a painter under Gustad's instruction. At the end of the novel when despite great resistance the wall is demolished as a part of the municipality's road-widening project, the pavement-artist's voice strikes the final irony -

In a world where roadside latrines become temples and shrines, and temples and shrines become dust and ruin, does it matter where? (338)

Therefore, Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* attempts to reinterpret the mainstream history of postcolonial India from the point of view of the diasporic Parsi community. It also works as a preamble of the mass migration of the Indian Parsis (as it is the case for Mistry himself) to another diaspora in the U. S. or in Canada from the late 1970s onwards. Summing up, we can aptly remember Michel Foucault's words from his book, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Intention* (1977) -

The traditional devices for constructing a comprehensive view of history and for retracting the past as a potent and continuous development must be systematically dismantled. (380)

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Resistance in Literature: The Indomitable Voice of Arundhati Roy with particular reference to ‘How Deep Shall We Dig?’

Avishek Chaudhury

The role of art and artist in society has remained one of the perennial debatable issues as artists have the unique ability to engage individuals in a very deep and personal way. Art can also help us understand our humanity and the historical conditions we live in. What is even more important is that it can draw us into thinking whether our reality needs to be changed. In other words art can be used as a catalyst of change, it can be used as a medium of confronting personal, social, political or national issues through criticism of the world as it is and a vision of the world as it might be.

A cursory glance at the evolving role of art and artist since the days of Plato also shows that with the advancement of society there is an increasing awareness of the artists to take part in the socio-cultural, religious, political and national issues of the country, directly or indirectly. And this has happened throughout the globe. Indian English literature is also not an exception. An overview of the Indian literary firmament clearly shows the increasing involvement of the writers in the issues of society. Raja Rao’s comment in the ‘Foreword’ to *Kanthapura* (1938) would be pertinent here:

“We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us. Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will some day prove to be a dialect which will some day prove to be as distinctive and colourful as the Irish or the American. Time alone will justify it.” (Rao v)

R.K. Narayan’s *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936), *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937); Khwaja Ahmad Abbas’s *Inquilab* (1955); Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* (1956); Asif Currimbhoy’s *The Captives* (1963), *The Dissident M.L.A.* (1974) and a host of other works clearly show the growing penchant of the artists for the use of art as a medium of socio-political expression and representation.

This increasing awareness of the writers achieves another dimension during the post-independence era which saw the emergence of a host of women writers like – Sashi Deshpande, Kamala Markandya, Geetha Hariharan, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Nayantara Sehgal and others who have brought radical changes in the writers’ outlook on socio-cultural matters by challenging the fundamentals of belief

and bringing the age-old customs under merciless scrutiny. Arundhati Roy belongs to this group of dare-devil brave hearts.

Roy came into the limelight with her maiden novel *The God of Small Things* (1997) which brought her instant success by crowning her with the prestigious Booker Prize. The novel has been regarded as one of the seminal books ever written in Indian fiction in English. It has widely been hailed as a bitter protest novel as it is radical, subversive and attacks several holy cows. The novel is truly an indictment, a discourse of the marginalized and subordinated. It crystallizes the issues of atrocities against children, women and untouchables and in fact all those dispossessed of an identity. If history is a chronicler of the winners – the ‘Laltains’, Roy is here engaged in re-writing the history of the margins – the ‘Mombattis’. But what makes Roy interesting is that after the publication of the novel instead of basking in the applause and fame she had earned with *The God of Small Things*, she rather transformed herself into an author-activist whose sole aim since then became to point out ‘the glaring disconnect between two Indias, about homelessness, rural destitution, unemployment, shrinking land, industrialization, privatization, globalization, terrorism, US imperialism, Hindutva nationalism and urban renewal which does away with those at the lowest rung of the socio-economic pyramid as well as atrocities of the state against the most marginalized and least empowered – in fact, all the subjects that are anathema to the proponents of Shining India.’¹

Till date Roy has to her credit four volumes of non-fictions: *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* (2001), *An Ordinary Person’s Guide to Empire* (2005), *Listening to Grasshoppers* (2009) and *Broken Republic* (2011) through which she has dissected the contemporary ‘glocal’ (global + local) politics and has shown / exposed how the machinery of democracy has been effectively subverted by the corrupt politicians, media barons, judges, powerful corporate lobbies and by a section of government officials. The underhand configuration is so powerful that it often undermines the lateral arrangements of checks and balances between constitution, courts of law, parliament, the administration and even the independent media that form the structural basis of a parliamentary democracy.

The essays of Roy deal with myriad issues, but the thread that binds them together is the importance given to the subalterns and the marginalized people – those who are methodically silenced and sidelined, and the culture of protest they generate to rebuff the ‘big brother’.

The present study however is limited to one particular essay of Roy ‘How Deep Shall we Dig?’ from the volume *Listening to Grasshoppers* where once again we see Roy musing on the issues that media neglects to read, politicians prefer not to hear, and urban Indian elites pretend don’t exist.

This essay, originally a lecture delivered at Aligarh Muslim University, India and later on published in *The Hindu* on 25 April 2004, is written against the back drop of a volatile situation when the old pluralistic India mutates with neo-liberalism and neo-globalization thus resulting in the spurt of communal fascism and collision of culture and traditional values. Roy however does not stop there by just pointing out the harsh condition; she also stresses upon the need to bring about a revolutionary change in the country and thereby presents strategies of resistance to foster alternative models of homogenous growth and development.

In the essay Roy has meticulously pointed out the outright lies and shady politics generated by the Power / Authority to satisfy their own vested socio-political and economic interest. Neo-globalization and neo-liberalization which were supposed to usher in a new age of economic prosperity and stability, of all-inclusive growth and development – instead divided India. The glaring disparity between these two Indias becomes evident when one sees that since independence around 50 million people have been displaced²– without proper resettlement and rehabilitation – for the development projects, 42% of the world’s underweight children younger than five live here³, 2,50,000 debt-ridden farmers have committed suicide (Shiva, *Making Peace* 8), 40% of the rural population has the same food grain absorption level as sub-Saharan Africa (Roy, *Listening to Grasshoppers* 31) on the other hand there is the rise of oligarchs and billionaires – like- Adanis, Ambanis, Tats, Birlas, Mittals. It is for them Special Economic Zones (SEZs) are created, vast stretches of lush green land are acquired, dams are built, subsidy is provided, debt is waived. At present Mukesh Ambani is personally worth \$31.3 billion.⁴ The palatial house he lives in – Antilia is the world’s most expensive residential property next to Buckingham Palace. Growth thus, instead of being all-inclusive, has become all-exclusive for a minority of capitalist people.

This grim picture is echoed in a recent study released by the rights group Oxfam on 16 January 2017. The study reveals the astonishing fact that India’s richest 1% now holds a huge 58% of the country’s total wealth, that just 57 billionaires in India now have same wealth - \$216 billion as that of the bottom 70% population of the country.⁵

The irony lies in the fact that the democratic government instead of protecting the rights of the poor people are acting as corporate agents. Through the means of privatization and commodification the government is allowing the multi-national companies and the corporate giants wholesale corporate takeover and appropriation of land, rivers, mountains, forests, minerals, water and what not! As for instance in Bhatta Parsaul, Greater Noida (UP) about 6,000 acres of land were forcefully acquired by Jai Prakash Associates. And what was the purpose? The purpose was to build luxury township and sport cities, including a Formula 1 race track. The case of Bhatta

Parsaul is not an isolated example rather there are plethora of examples – Kerala, Maharashtra, Orissa, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh – where tens of thousands of acres of land have been grabbed in the name of SEZs or for big projects. It is to be noted that the Maoist insurrection in India is largely against this capitalist aggression. And Roy in her *Broken Republic*, a collection of four mighty essays has analysed in detail the accumulated injustice inflicted upon the poor *adivasis* and tribal people in the name of growth and development.

The crisis of modern Indian democracy deepens when we see that in the name of creating good investment climate draconian laws like Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) has been enacted to subjugate and crush any kind of public resistance. For Roy ‘POTA is the broad-spectrum antibiotic for the disease of dissent’ (Roy, *Listening to Grasshoppers* 37). Another noted anti-globalization writer and environmentalist Vandana Shiva also states that :

“Defense of livelihoods, as well as democratic protest, is threatened under globalization’s new police states.” (Shiva, *India Divided* 117)

To get rid off this crisis of civilization—from this dehumanizing system of corporate globalization and neo-liberalization, for a paradigm shift we need to globalize our dissent. We have to nurture the culture of protest to reclaim our freedom, our space, our right. And here the intellectuals, the artists, the writers have a significant role to play to make people aware about this social, political, economic and ecological costs they are paying for this blind, uneven progress.

Roy’s ‘How Deep Shall We Dig?’ therefore becomes a passionate plea to the writers, the authors, the intellectuals and all the good-natured people of the earth to dismantle the grand narratives of flawed progress presently pursuit and instead to architect newer methods of alternative growth to combat the ill effects of corporate globalization and economic neo-liberalization.

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Man's (Non) belonging: Oppressive Privileges in Shashi Deshpande's *A Matter of Time*

Soumyadeep Chakraborty

Alongside the projection of the female protagonists, *A Matter of Time*, being the third novel of Shashi Deshpande that came out in the year 1996 from Penguin Books, USA and India, tells us about the hardships faced by men. In showcasing the familial problems and relational crisis, fathers and husbands share equal hands with the mothers, wives and daughters. Emphasizing Deshpande's humanist approach above being taken as an out and out feminist, Dalvir Singh Dahlawat in his book *Turmoil and Turn* has rightly comments:

Deshpande's concerns are beyond feminist in her novel *A Matter of Time*. It tries to penetrate and analyze the very predicament of human existence and solve the riddle of life. (158)

Shashi Deshpande has given voice not only to the crises of women but also male predicaments in *A Matter of Time*. Other than projecting feminist issues exclusively, the author here comes up with familial and relational concerns, as we see in her other novels like *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *That long Silence*, and that is the reason why we have equally spaced out portions for men and their problems here in *A Matter of Time*. Beena Agarwal in her book entitled *Mosaic of the Fictional World of Shashi Deshpande* remarks:

The central plot of the novel is conceived to depict the various dimensions of familial relationship but the vision of familial relationship in *A Matter of Time* has been sublimated to a wider consideration of human relationship that determines the nature of human existence. (100)

Agarwal's view definitely receives a compliment by the insightful view that has been shared by Deshpande herself with Geeta Gangadharan in an interview where she says:

Undoubtedly my novels are all about family relationship. But... I go beyond that because the relationships that which exist within the family are to an extent, parallel to the relationship which exist between human beings outside...when I am writing about the

family, it is not just about the family. It definitely does not limit my canvas. On the contrary that is where everything begins. (“Denying the Otherness”¹)

A Matter of Time is a novel in which the plot journeys through three different generations. Kalyani represents the first generation, an offended wife of Shripati. Sumi, the eldest daughter of Kalyani and Gopal’s wife represents the second generation and Aru, the eldest daughter of Sumi along with her two sisters Charu and Seema are the representatives of the third generation. Though Deshpande has given wide room to these female characters, she does never fail to come up with men and their problems irrespective of generation. Apart from the generational shifts, the novel is divided into three parts-‘The House’, ‘The Family’ and ‘The River’. The novel starts and ends with a description of ‘The House’ which is called as “Vishvas”. Here, “Vishvas” does not mean for giving room to any abstraction, it is rather used as the substitution of the name of Kalyani’s ancestor Vithalrao. Majority of the plot is structured by Sumi’s gaze, her narration, her reflection to the past and her determination not to submit before stereotypical role-playing. The privilege of son in a middle-class Indian family is quite evident in narrator’s words as she depicts her parental home as “built by a man not just for himself, but for his sons and his son’s sons” (AMT 3). There is a constant admiration for a son and attitude of transference of ancestral legacy and estates alone to male successors and never to ‘changeable descendants’ or women that has been brought forth by Deshpande. Deshpande here attempts to highlight the issue of the empowerment of women in every way, even in terms of acquiring ancestral property. Even the situation around her remains the same after getting married with Gopal.

This three-generation-story though moves through the portrayals of three women, it never fails to posit the problems of their husband and father figures at the same time. Among the three women, the first two are Kalyani and Sumi who suffer a lot by losing their life in the hands of men in the name of marriage, patriarchy, socio-cultural norm, familial affinity, and the third one Aru is found to struggle hard to bring changes in the life of her grandma and mother. Like *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *That Long Silence*, *A Matter of Time* comes up with a series of man-woman relationships among which the most prominent is that of between Sumi and Gopal. If the novel stands for projecting Sumi’s struggle and strife, it, in no less a way, showcases Gopal’s crisis as well. Gopal is portrayed as a character who suffers a lot to protect his identity. Both the beginning and the end of the story have the same scenes of his departure from family where he finds dissatisfaction and seems to be boring with routine work and role-playing. The story starts with his separation from his wife, Sumi with their three daughters- Aru, Charu and Seema. The whole family receives a blow by Gopal’s sudden decision to leave them. He has decided to shirk all responsibilities which an

Indian society expects from men to handle. Gopal is portrayed as a free-thinking man, a man who does not love to conform to the roles expected from him, a man who chooses his own way and destiny. This is the reason why he decides to marry Sumi, a lady with the zeal of breaking the path. The thing that attracted Gopal's attention at that point of time was Sumi's urge of going beyond her father's patriarchal clutches and making a space of her own. Sumi's breaking out of the paternal hold by going to Gopal's room in the middle of the night and asking him to marry her impressed him to a great extent. Gopal's non-conformist zeal received compliment from Sumi's mode of thinking, and they started a happy conjugal life. But now the situation has changed totally; Gopal now decides to leave the family and most strikingly without showing any reason. If we examine the cause of such action, we would find that it is again Gopal's non-conformism that instigates him to take such a decision. He does not want to be an ordinary man; he does not like to fit into the role of a traditional male figure in a middle-class Indian family. He despises the systematized idea of getting married, giving birth to children, bringing them up, fulfilling his dreams through his children like rotating the same cycle. Therefore, he starts to suffer being within the cloister of familial and relational expectations. He is not a man who loves to be seen as the guardian to the rest of the family, rather he desperately tries to escape being taken as the supreme male of the family capable of maintaining all the responsibilities. Therefore, he decides to shirk all responsibilities which an Indian society expects men to handle. His leaving the family therefore is his desperate attempt to step beyond the stereotypes.

Gopal's decision of leaving the family definitely exhibits his escapism. But Gopal is not a born escapist. From his early days, he has been obtaining a personality that rejects to submit at other's will. Such bent of mind has put him in trouble time and again. Even he has been criticized for marrying a woman who, in the eyes of the society, does not value other's views, elders' advices and counseling. But, on the contrary, this becomes the factor behind Gopal's choosing of Sumi as life-partner. The narrative provides some glimpses at Gopal's crisis in sticking to his individual assertion against society approved principles. Gender critics like Kimmel, Pleck, Carrigan, Connell, Lee have often opined that one who tries to conform a unique voice of gender in a non-conformist way at first faces problems from the socio-cultural normative principles that usually contribute the most in the formation of 'gender'. It happens thus because gender, according to R.W. Connell, is:

...a way in which social practice is ordered. In gender processes, the everyday conduct of life is organized in relation to a reproductive arena, defined by the bodily structures and processes of human reproduction. This arena includes sexual arousal and intercourse, childbirth and infant care, bodily sex difference and similarity. (*Masculinities* 71)

Therefore, there must be compatibility between socially approved norms, practices, expectations and individual take in relation to gender. It happens the same as well in the formation of 'masculinity' in an alternative way. In Gopal's case, it has happened in the same fashion. The third-world, middle-class society in which Gopal is born and nurtured sees a man as one who always comes up to maintain duties, performs the familial responsibilities as sole concern. This is referred to by the critics of Indian masculinity like Mangesh Kulkarni, Avani Kumar and sociologists like Radhika Chopra as an expected fatherliness in Indian men even before biologically being a father. These critics are of the view that in India, men amidst the upsurge of feminism and liberalism in modern and post-modern scenario often get entangled by the expectation of coming up as an all-knowing, supreme guardian-like male figure that has been endowed upon them by the 'agents' of society and culture. Gopal likewise faces problems as he tries to break the shackles of traditional archetypes. In Deshpande, Indian middle-class family often turns into the microcosm of Indian society. Gopal's decision to leave the family therefore unfolds his attempt to escape the society as well.

In addition to the unrest that Gopal receives from the deliberation of the social laws, his masculine crisis has been doubled for not having a male heir. The crisis of not having male heir remains a persistent theme in *A Matter of Time*; it haunts the fabric of the family from one generation to another, from Sumi's paternal home to her in-laws place where Gopal is found to be the worst sufferer of it perhaps. Gopal's vision and version used to differ from others. That is the reason why he is found to live a detached life. But this detachment reaches to complete dissociation when he realizes a perpetual vacuum in his life for not having a male heir. He starts to withdraw himself from worldly associations since his desire of having a son is not fulfilled. Factors involved in formulating crisis in Gopal in this regard are quite complex. He has been longing for a male child to celebrate his fatherliness and it leads us to reflect on the age-old Indian custom that certifies the giving birth of a male child as the chief signifier of being called a father or even a mother in the truest sense of the term. Being tired of fighting and struggling with his non-conformism against the social codes, Gopal has been thinking of making an end of it by procuring a male child and standing tall in the social parameters. Not having a male heir therefore shatters his hope badly. Besides this, he has been found to cherish a desire to have a male heir upon whom he will be able to unburden his responsibilities in his middle age. Procuring a male heir is therefore an opportunity to him to escape the 'oppressive privileges'² that entangles him in the labyrinth of duties and responsibilities. Gopal wants to escape all these but without being called an escapist and it could happen only when someone comes up to fulfil the vacuum that would be created by his avoidance or escapism. In one way, it reminds us of the opportunity that had been received by Ulysses in Alfred Tennyson's poem

“Ulysses” to go out to ‘drink life to the lees’ only when his son Telemachus took the charge of his throne, his sceptre and his house-hold duties. Ulysses achieved comfort in a way that he need not thought of his duties. But, Gopal here is found to be denied of solace. Instead of fulfilment, frustration starts to visit him incessantly. Desperate attempts at procuring male heir can be seen in giving birth to child one after another, but irony plays its role when all offsprings appear in the form of girl-child. Sumi’s narration asserts that it was not only the wild will of the family but Gopal’s desperation as well that dragged her to go through child-bearing again and again. Gopal’s desperation to be a father of a male-child is generated from his complex thinking of escaping his ‘manly responsibilities’³ by shifting those to the shoulders of his son so that no one would raise finger to him to call him irresponsible. Thus, quite interestingly, Gopal’s desperation comes up as an effect caused by dual sense of escapism. Gopal’s failure each time reminds us of Lacanian concept of ‘lack’⁴. The more he is facing the failure, the more he becomes desperate.

Apart from predicaments of the women, Shashi Deshpande has portrayed a male’s feelings excellently in *A Matter of Time*. Besides the careful portraiture of the female characters like Kalyani, Sumi and Aru, victimization of men and their claustrophobic conditions have also been handled with care and perfection in this novel. Inarticulacy of men and their suffering out of their own inability to share their problems have been remaining one of the key issues in Deshpande’s novels. Inability to share his conflict with Sarita makes Manohar a brutal husband who begins to gratify himself by raping his wife in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*. Mohan’s inarticulacy to express his inner turmoil to Jaya leads him to leave the house in *That Long Silence*. Likewise, Gopal’s failure to share his conflicts with anybody in the family in general and with his wife Sumi in particular has made him to feel himself an ‘outsider’. The fact that must be noted, at this juncture, is that it is not sure whether Gopal’s failure to share what he is thinking or feeling is his inability or his deliberate choice because he used to think that sharing his feelings and emotions to anybody would create sympathy for him which he despises most. Perhaps that is the reason why he suppresses all his agonies and struggles himself due to the lapse of a male child. He struggles within himself and undergoes severe inner conflict. Here he finds his predicament to match with that of Hamlet. His agonizing experience is expressed thus:

It was when I read Hamlet, fortunately much later, that the most terrible versions of my parents’ story entered my mind. Just that once, though, for I slammed the door on it immediately. In this story my father became a man succumbing to his passion for his brother’s wife, the woman compliant, a pregnancy and a child to come and then, after the husband’s convenient death (no, I couldn’t, I just couldn’t my father poison his brother) a marriage

of convenience. (*AMT* 43)

Gopal gradually realizes that between their parents there was no happy marital bond, there was only a give-and-take relationship as witnessed in the case of a colonizer and a colonized. Gopal also realizes that his father was his mother's 'guilty partner'. Being a son, Gopal despised his father but he still had respect for fatherhood. And that is the reason perhaps why he, in later days of his life, becomes desperate to be the father of a male-child to perfect the gaze of a son for his father who will be none other than Gopal himself.

He suffers a lot in his life and this uninterrupted suffering has detached him from the persons around him. From his childhood, Gopal finds himself amidst miseries and shocking incidents. He becomes parentless at the age of five as they die in an accident. Then he is brought up by his sister Sudha and her husband, P.K. Even though Sudha and his father are different, he has been nurtured by Sudha with motherly affection. Gopal's detachment brings in him a sense of self-dejection as well, a sense of regret on his own perturbed existence. He continues to lead his life covering his face and shutting his eyes from the pomp and joy of the world around him. But situation begins to turn when he comes in contact with Sumi, a charming lady with psychic firmness. He falls in love with Sumi for her charming appearance, personality and modesty, and Sumi too admires Gopal's personality. Sumi's path-breaking attitude attracts Gopal's attention in no time. Sumi's breaking out of the paternal hold by going to Gopal's room in the middle of the night and asking him to marry her impresses him most. They head towards the decision of marriage. Sumi's narration here brings forth Gopal's take on marriage. He believes, "Marriage is not for everyone. The demand it makes- a lifetime of commitment- is not possible for all of us." (*AMT* 69). From this statement it becomes quite clear that though Gopal enters into the marital bond with Sumi, the woman whom he himself chooses to marry, his existential unrest and escapist inclination do not get uprooted. Sumi's rumination of Gopal's words at the time of marriage is also evocative of that. She recollects how Gopal at that time proposed that if either of the two wanted to be free, he or she would be allowed to leave. They got married on a mutual agreement of separation at any time without citing any reason for it. They had also agreed on causing no disturbance to each other after separation. This also reflects to Gopal's political stance. He knew his mind well; he knew that in some corner of his mind he is still remaining a dissociative man who fails to procure absolute attachment with his family.

The marriage proves to be a happy one for few years but Gopal's anxiety and unrest start to affect the marital knot when he feels disinterested in domestic life. Being dejected from his failure in procuring completeness in earthly paradigm, he moves towards asceticism. What seems to be the most striking thing is that he was not an out and out pious man earlier. He loved a woman, married her and had physical

union with her as well. But throughout his life he has been remaining a man detached from familial and relational expectations, and it has made him self-centred to a great extent. Gopal's crisis emerges from this self-centredness that restricts him from giving value to other's views and responses. His psychological complexity and crisis become doubled with his jealous feelings. He enjoys physical pleasure in his youth, but when he sees his wife nursing the children, caring intensely for them, he starts to feel himself an 'outsider' in the family. Gender critics like Reeser, Kimmel and anthropologists like Malinowski and Mead have pointed out that men often face problems regarding their gender consciousness after becoming fathers. It happens because men often fail to endure before their eyes that the love and care that have been enjoyed by them for a long are being snatched away. In this connection they start to feel their offsprings as 'intruders' and themselves as 'outsiders'. These factors, that create crisis in the psyche of men as father figures, have dealt with prominent focus and attention in Freudian and Jungian psychoanalysis as well. Gopal's feelings and frustration definitely conform these views. Time and again he is found to live within 'emptiness' and say that "A man is always an outsider". His psychological complexity becomes quite clear when he says that a man has to search continually for a reason to live whereas a woman has an overriding reason in her children (*AMT* 68). He has been nurturing the feeling of isolation and emptiness for a long and it has destroyed in him faith in life and hope for good things to happen. Life seems to be a hollow stuff and role-playing is masquerading to him. That is the reason why he is found to suffer intensely out of a sense of non-belonging.

He tries to make his point that now he is willing to enter into the fourth phase of his life that is 'sanyasa'. Gopal, like a sage, decides he has had enough of being a householder and goes on to leave Sumi and three daughters so as to enter into the fourth sphere in a man's life according to Indian Vedic tradition. But the question that emerges at this juncture is whether he really wants to enter into living an ascetic life with the goal of achieving spiritual solace or he is using it as a safe-guard for his escapism. Gopal faces no problem in executing his decision as she has been numbed by their pre-marital agreement. Gopal does not fail to unfold his gratefulness to Sumi for this. S. Prasanna Sree in her book *Woman in the Novels of Shashi Deshpande* comments that:

Gopal is grateful to Sumi for not asking any questions and thus saving him of much embarrassment and possible mortification of voicing half truths. (111)

With the feeling of himself being an 'outsider' and with the constant emotional detachment from his family, life seems to be 'a site of emptiness and meaninglessness' to him. Leaving the family and leading the life of a saint was Gopal's answer to his inner conflict. If we take his decision as a truthful following of Vedic tradition, then his

leaving the family proves to be unjust. He had not been dragged to marriage, neither had he been forced to beget children and form a family. And now he is leaving everything behind him in search of solace without bothering about his wife and children. This, as Jasbir Jain says, "...puts a question mark on the four fold divisions of ashramas which gives the husband the choice of moving out of a householder's life."⁵

His leaving the household can not be an equivalent to the Vedic concept of 'renunciation' or 'sanyasa'⁶. In an essay, "*A Matter of Time: Beyond the Stranglehold of Women*", N. Poovalingam, in this regard, writes:

...the perception...that Gopal's desertion of his family signifies the Vedic renunciation...is not entirely convincing...Gopal's abandoning the family is not the result of saturation in the worldly life. It is more a withdrawal in pain than a renunciation due to contentment. Moreover, Gopal's life has nothing to offer in lines corresponding to the other Vedic stages in a man's life...His predicament is more akin to the existentialist's. (174)

Gopal is tired of continual facing of suffering and loss. The recurring sense of dwelling within the vast sea of incompleteness has made him a desperate pleader of the ironical, enigmatic idea of 'completeness' in one hand and more desperate an escapist on the other. This becomes clear when, referring to *Mahabharata*, he mentions Arjuna who, being tired of the male world, comes up in the disguise of Brihannala⁷, an enticing, veteran female dancer and a eunuch. Arjuna as Brihannala also represents androgyny which is evocative of completeness. Androgyny, according to Hindu mythology and scriptures, is the emblem of divine perfection. Brihannala is taken as a metaphoric and symbolic substitution of the image of Lord Shiva as 'Hara-Parvati' with the appearance of half male and half female within one single physic that has been remaining an eternal symbol of completeness. Completeness is reflected through androgyny as it nullifies any gender particularities, as it rejects the idea of being essentially masculine or feminine. In the realm of psychoanalysis, Carl Jung has discussed specifically the suppressed or repressed urge in human beings of being androgynous in order to get rid of their incomplete existence⁸. In this connection, Gopal's reference to Arjuna as Brihannala, at this juncture, suggests his tiredness and subsequent reluctance for carrying forth himself as an emblem of manliness capable of performing all masculine responsibilities expected from him. In a way, it also suggests his desperate plea for completeness. Gopal's reference can also be seen as a manifestation of his frustration as Brihannala assumed to be a eunuch. As he has been suffering from the feeling of the meaninglessness of his existence for a long, through this reference he, perhaps, has tried to equate his unproductive state with that of a eunuch.

Sumi never shows any reluctance of letting Gopal choose his own way, but he fails to attain repose even after leaving her. Gopal's mind is still around his family, his children especially around Sumi. His mind is filled with the feelings of physical pleasure in the marital relationship. But he is not ready to return home and join them again as he believes that returning to the place that he left at his own decision will surely dwarf his self-esteem and hurt his masculine authority. His continual escapism now has denied him of any place to belong, physically and emotionally. Gopal gradually realizes that Sumi has empowered emotionally and financially, and it has brought the family into the mainstream. He realizes that his wife has been empowered by her small but firm efforts, by her tenacity of sticking to a point till change comes, and that's why she now has turned increasingly independent. According to Beena Agarwal, Gopal is the only authentically portrayed male character created by Shashi Deshpande; in him she intends to probe into the inner crisis of male psyche.

A Matter of Time is such a novel where almost all the characters are found to be vexed and afflicted by problems. While the problems faced by women in the novel are circumstantial, and situational in most of the cases, men's are found to be created by their own escapism and self-centeredness. *A Matter of Time* deals with the continual suffering of Gopal out of a sense of not belonging to his own family and crisis caused by being entangled amidst the labyrinths of oppressive privileges on man in relation to his family, in particular and society, in general. Considering Gopal's human existence, we must admit that Gopal belongs, but, at the same time, we must acknowledge that Gopal belongs to an all-pervasive sense of non-belonging.

Notes

1. This is quoted from an interview of Shashi Deshpande taken by Geeta Gangadharan. The interview came out in *Indian Communicator* with the title, "Denying the Otherness" on 20th November, 1994.
2. 'Oppressive privileges' refer to those privileges that proved to be oppressive in reality than being beneficial. Particularly in connection with Masculinity Studies, critics, scholars, thinkers have often marked how the privilege of being a man often turns to be torturous and oppressive to them in a patriarchal socio-cultural set up especially. Shashi Deshpande's novels like *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *That Long Silence* and *A Matter of Time*, to a considerable extent, highlight the problems in men regarding this privilege.
3. This phrase has been elaborated by R.W. Connell in his book *Masculinities*. He says that the term not only means responsibilities that a man should perform but responsibilities that are expected to be undertaken by men whether they like it or not.
4. French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan appropriated the term 'lack' in the realm of psychoanalysis to designate 'a lack of being' at the time of elaborating the concept of 'desire'. He says, "Desire is a relation to being to lack. The lack is the lack of being properly speaking. It is not the lack of this or that, but lack of being whereby the being

- exists.” See also the book *Jacques Lacan* by Sean Homer.
5. This quoted observation has been taken from the book entitled *Gendered Realities, Human Spaces: The Writing of Shashi Deshpande* by Jasbir Jain.
 6. Vedic concept of ‘renunciation’ and ‘ashramas’ refer to the four age-based stages of human life practised in ancient days, especially in the medieval era, in India. The four ashramas are : ‘Brahmacharya’ (studentship), ‘Garhastha’ (householder), ‘Vanaprastha’ (retired life) and ‘Sanyasa’ (renunciation). Ashrama system is one of the major components of the ethical theories in Indian philosophy, where it is combined with four proper goals of human life (‘Purusartha’).
 7. Brihannala was the name taken by Arjuna in disguise in *Mahabharata*. Arjuna spent almost one year of his exile as Brihannala at King Virata’s kingdom. He was appointed for teaching song and dance to the princess Uttara.
 8. See two books written by Carl Jung, *The Aspects of Feminine* and *The Aspects of Masculine* in relation to the concepts of ‘anima’ and ‘animus’.

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Discourse of Marginality and the Indigenous Literature of Australia and India: A Study

Indranil Acharya

I

Marginality has emerged as a dominant discourse in the 21st century. Several factors contribute to the making of the discourse of marginality— state policies, development paradigms, shifting social priorities, amorphous political formations, globalized terror networks and many others. But the most significant marker would probably be the growing intolerance, even among the intelligentsia, for accepting cultural plurality— particularly the polyphony of indigeneity. We may begin with the observations of a great postmodernist theorist, Jean- Francois Lyotard, on the piquant situation of minority/ marginalised cultures vis- a- vis the majoritarian discourse of power.

Minorities affirm another space made of a patchwork of laws and customs (one says cultures now) - without a center... Nothing is more difficult than the struggles of minorities who want to remain minorities, who want to be recognized as such. Societies transform them into new powers. It interprets them, that is, inscribes them... and so, it robs them of their own particular power... It is necessary to insist that the struggles of minorities do not gain their force from any critique, from being placed in relation to the center...[Their] reality is no more real than the reality of power, the reality of the institution... it is as real. But it is minority reality and thus it is necessarily multiple or, if you prefer, singular. It does not live some place where the politics of great does not live; it lives on the same surface, but in a different way. (Lyotard, 112)

This observation holds ground in the minority cultural context across the globe— Australia, Africa, Canada, USA, India and other countries where minority population is a formidable presence. In fact, identity politics or identitarian politics based on ethnicity, language or dialect is a global phenomenon in the 21st century especially in the domain of subalternity/ marginality. Minority cultures and languages are perpetually drawn into the discourse of representation of identity. Politics of exclusion and strategic inclusion always problematizes the process of self assertion in the cultural domain with specific

reference to language. In this connection, it will be quite relevant to refer to the observations of two leading postmodern French philosophers- Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari:

How many people today live in a language that is not their own? Or no longer, or not yet, even know their own and know poorly the major language that they are forced to serve? This is the problem of immigrants, and especially of the children, the problem of minorities, the problem of a minor literature, but also the problem for all of us. (Deleuze and Guattari 19)

We would call this a blur, a mixed-up history, a political situation, but linguists don't know about this, don't want to know about this, since, as linguists, they are "apolitical", pure scientists. Even Chomsky compensated for this scientific apoliticism only by his courageous struggles against the war in Vietnam. (ibid, 24)

Thus, it becomes quite obvious from the above observation that minority literature and language do not have a pre-given norm. Its identity is always made provisional, in the process of creation. Later, when we discuss the plight of tribal language communities in the eastern part of India, this officially cooked-up history of minority cultures will manifest the 'blur' impact- a 'mixed up' language identity. The language-dialect binary turns out to be a political statement to control diversity and promote uniformity at the cost of 'lesser cultures'. Further examples of this phenomenon are often cited from the domain of African American literature. It refers to a modified African American dialect that was formalized as a language into a field called *Ebonics*. In fact, *Ebonics* tells of the position of minor languages as something that is alien and as Deleuze describes it "strange." This strangeness explains the politics of exclusion to a large extent. However, in my paper, I would rather focus on the Australian Aboriginal situation as this demands a frequent visit for greater global visibility in recent years. The revival of atrocities on the Aboriginal population has complicated the discourse of marginality even more than the other national contexts.

Deleuze and Guattari observe that each new text in Australian Aboriginal literature transforms what it is to be Aboriginal in White Australia. Being Aboriginal is presented as a process of becoming and negotiation, incorporating and transforming images from without. In fact, these external majoritarian forces have applied brute power even in the twentieth century to transform images of aboriginality and assimilate the plurality of indigenous identity into the matrix of a homogeneity, a mono-cultural matrix that is perpetually associated with a nationalist discourse, a pseudo- patriotic space which finally turns out to be a boa- constrictor and ruthlessly swallows difference in culture, language and other significant human expressions. In this context, I would like

to refer to a heart-rending report published in *The Guardian* on Friday 21st March, 2014. It was written by John Pilger with reference to the resurrection of the ghost of stolen generation regime in the 21st century. The title of the report reads– “The mass removal of indigenous children from their parents continues unabated – where is the outrage?” In fact, the journalist opines that the condition of Aborigines in Canada or the tribal population in India or even the vast indigenous population in many African countries is not so bleak in the present day situation compared to Australia. Even the mandarins in the Australian high commission in India are not comfortable in dealing with questions about the violation of Aboriginal Human Rights in Australia. Pilger refers to an audio tape that reveals an extremely inhuman treatment of Aboriginal children. There is the voice of an infant screaming as he is wrenched from his mother, who pleads, “There is nothing wrong with my baby. Why are you doing this to us? I would have been hung years ago, would not I? It is because [as an Aboriginal Australian] you’re guilty before you are found innocent.” The child’s grandmother demands to know why “the stealing of our kids is happening all over again.” A welfare official says, “I’m gunna take him, mate. ”

This happened to an Aboriginal family in outback New South Wales. It is happening across Australia in a scandalous and largely unrecognized abuse of human rights that evokes the infamous stolen generations of the last century. Up to the 1970s, thousands of Aboriginal children were stolen from their mothers by welfare officials. In the name of Assimilation policy, insidious racism in the political elite, the bureaucracy and wider Australian society still exists.

It is this state policy which attempts to efface minority identity and minority reality through a systematic abduction of Aboriginal children. Their ultimate objective is to alienate future generations of Aboriginal communities from their own culture, language and other salient traits of Aboriginality. In fact, there is a concerted White Australian campaign to negate Aboriginal history which is nearly 40,000 years old. This process of marginalization and subsequent threat of total extinction is poignantly recorded in major literary works of Australian Aboriginal authors– Sally Morgan, Mudrooroo, Oedgeroo and contemporary authors like Alexis Wright and Kim Scott. I would like to refer to Oedgeroo’s poems as a living testimony of this White Australian policy of threatening Aboriginal culture and languages and the resultant fierce protest launched by the poet. The poem ‘Assimilation No!’, taken from her anthology, *The Dawn is at Hand*, registers this concern quite emphatically–

We must surrender now much that we love,

The old freedoms for new musts,

Your world for ours,

But a core is left that we must keep always.

Change and compel, slash us into shape,

But not our roots deep in the soil of old.

We are different hearts and minds

In a different body. Do not ask of us

To be deserters, to disown our mother,

To change the unchangeable.

The gum cannot be trained into an oak. (Oodgeroo, 26)

In another celebrated poem, “We Are Going” the concern for inevitable endangerment and extinction of minority identity is even more pronounced.

They came here to the place of their old bora ground

Where now the many white men hurry about like ants,

Notice of the estate agent reads: ‘Rubbish May Be Tipped Here.’

.....

The scrubs are gone, the hunting and the laughter.

The eagle is gone, the emu and the kangaroo are gone from this place.

The bora ring is gone.

The corroboree is gone.

And we are going.’ (Oodgeroo, 28)

The sacred space of bora ring is defiled and used as a dumping ground. All the traditional associations of an Aboriginal identity are no longer to be found. Now it is the turn of the Aboriginal people to leave their land and cultural baggage. It is time to abandon their familiar environment as well.

There are quite a large number of Aboriginal languages in Australia. But the Assimilation policy of White Australia has decimated a large number of these minority tongues. Almost all the languages are endangered. The number of surviving speakers is abysmally low. A list of Aboriginal languages and number of speakers, borrowed from Wikipedia, can provide the real feel of the alarming situation:

Language	Speakers
Adnyamathanha language	110 (2006)
Alawa language	12 (2006)

Amarag language	01 (Charlie Mungulda)
Bayungu language	02
Dhargari language	01
Gaagudju language	06(1981) extinct now
Giyug language	02
Guwamu language	01 (1981) extinct now
Kamu language	02 (1967) ”
Kokata language	03 (1981) ”
Lardil language	02 (2000) critically endangered
Mangerr language	01 (1981) –extinct now
Ngawun language	01 (1981) extinct

This is a snapshot of minor/ marginalized languages in Australia. It comments poignantly on the terrible condition of these language speakers. The persistent drive to convert Australia into a monolingual nation with one mega language English, deliberately ignores the multilingual Aboriginal reality. The coercive measures are so intense that a pidgin variety of Australian Aboriginal English now boasts of more than 30,000 speakers in the post-contact era. In fact, almost all the Aboriginal writers of contemporary Australia write in this pidgin variety- documenting the subaltern reality in an alien tongue.

II

Let us look at the Indian situation and briefly review the minority reality in the national context. In the UNESCO list of endangered languages 2500 out of a total of 6000 languages are endangered. And India tops the list with 196 endangered languages. If we look at this list we find five categories of endangerment. Rabha, Khasi and Mundari are endangered. Koch and Kuraru are definitely endangered while Parji and Godaba are severely endangered. Languages with critically endangered status are Birhor, Kui and Pengo. At least 09 languages of eastern and north- eastern states have become extinct as well. (Anandabazar Patrika 21 February 2010, Jagari Bandyopadhyay).

Keeping in mind the plight of Australian Aboriginal languages it may be observed that all these endangered languages of India are tribal languages. Now the question arises: how do the tribal languages of India get marginalized over the last few centuries? In a multicultural and multilingual country like India this overt threat to plurality is also a strategy to derecognize the minority cultural spaces. As these minor languages happen to be mostly oral in form they have been silenced by majoritarian policies of colonialism

and even neo-colonialism. Since the time of Sir William Jones efforts have been made to codify bio-cultural diversity and tradition of knowledge systems of numerous oral communities. Western cognitive categories were applied to streamline Indian knowledge systems. In this process the oral communities were excluded as a matter of policy. It was the official way of marginalizing oral tribal cultures. But in the pre-colonial times there was no conflict between language and dialect or written language and orality. During the colonial times use of print technology destroyed many oral traditions. The new norm of literature attached greater importance to the 'written' text than the oral medium. Mono-lingual texts dominated the literary scene. The languages which could not make themselves to print were dubbed as inferior. Even after independence the colonial practices prevailed. Languages which failed to boast of 'printed' literature were de-recognized whereas new states were formed on the basis of languages having 'printed' literature.

The Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution was created for incorporating Indian languages in use. It began with 14 languages and later increased its tally to 24. But unfortunately all expenses on education sector were mostly confined to these 24 languages. In the 1961 census, 1652 mother tongues were recognised. But in the 1971 census, the number was drastically reduced to 108. The policy was to recognise a language community having at least 10,000 speakers. As a result, 1500 mother tongues fell silent- most of these languages used by the nomadic and indigenous tribes. A strange kind of cultural 'aphasia' was created and it spelt disaster for many tribal cultural traditions. Tribal languages in India and the inhabitable process of their marginalization in the colonial and post-colonial times should be analysed from these broader perspective.

Now, these policies of language recognition and the resultant formation of major and minor identities should be discussed in the light of a major linguistic phenomenon of the late 19th and early 20th century— George Abraham Grierson's *Linguistic Survey of India*. This paper focuses on the cultural policies embodied in this survey and its far-reaching consequences on the representation of the minor language communities in the Indian subcontinent. My special focus would be on the first volume of Grierson's *Linguistic Survey of Bengal* and the representation of a section of cross-border minor language communities domiciled in the eastern states of Bengal, Bihar (now mostly in Jharkhand) and Odisha.

Grierson's *Linguistic Survey of India* was, of course, part of the mammoth, many- pronged movement to produce colonial knowledge. It was of a piece with identical surveys in geology, cartography and anthropology- all new sciences anchored in pure British empiricism. Their relationship with power is obvious. The unknown is a source of fear. If you know something, you begin to control it. More than the military

or the law, this was at the heart of British hegemonic power. It contained a taunt- we know you, ahistorical being, better than you know yourself- that the befuddled native swallowed whole.

Grierson's survey too was called a "great Imperial museum... (of the) linguistic botany of India." The metaphor is revealing. Languages as living thing; and here we had a whole bunch of specimens pinned to the book, like beetles or neem leaves, neatly annotated. As if nothing exists outside this classification- an absolute catalogue of living tongues. As Shahid Amin reminds us, the survey and its recordings were not meant for Indian scholars. They were shipped out in their entirety to Britain, to become training material for young British civil servants. Grierson had to lobby the colonial administration for years before he could get his project going in 1898. He then spends three decades deciphering the data at his cottage in Surrey with the defined aim of fashioning a colonial tool. (Sunil Menon, Outlook, September 9, 2013, 31)

This colonial design compels me to question the underlying politics of Grierson's survey method. First of all, the term of Grierson's 'language hunters' were predetermined to produce a set of knowledge that would facilitate the young British colonial administrators.

Secondly, in many cases the native informants gleefully ignored many native language communities including primitive tribal groups as it required more extensive research in the eastern Indian states.

Thirdly, there was a declared tilt towards the maintenance of a monolingual framework in terms of a state language. Bangla remained the only language of South Bengal whereas all others were dubbed as 'dialects' or 'sub-dialects' or 'mixed sub-dialects'. The use-value of this survey, thus, was to undermine and silence the linguistic identity of many marginalized communities.

In *Linguistic Survey of Bengal* volume 1, Grierson catalogues even tribal languages under the broad category of 'Bengali Dialects'—

Western Bengali has one sub-dialect called Kharia- Thar, spoken by the wild tribes, who inhabit the hills in the south of Manbhum, and another called Mal- Paharia spoken in the centre of Santal Parganas. Another variety of the dialect, called Saraki, is spoken by the Jains of Lohardaga. (Grierson, 17)

Grierson was particularly irreverent about the largest linguistic community of the Jangal Mahal districts- Kurmali. There is a persistent attempt to project the language as alien or strange and to project the language status. The chapter on 'Western Bengali' bears testimony to this fact-

For instance, there is the curious dialect bearing many names, but which is usually known as Kurmali, spoken in Manbhum, Singhbhum and the neighbouring Native States. This is sometimes written in Bengali, sometimes in the Oriya, character. Closely connected with it are the so-called Bengali of Hazaribagh and the Panch-pargania dialect spoken in East Ranchi. These, on the ground that their grammatical basis is distinctly that of Bihari, I have classed as dialect of that language, although, in the case of Hazaribagh, it is called Bengali by the local authorities. (Grierson, 77).

Grierson is equally dismissive in the case of another 'sub-dialect' of Western Bengali ...

One of these is the language spoken by the Jains in the south-east of the Ranchi District, a District, be it remembered, of which the language of the main bulk of population is not Bengali. It is called indifferently by the surrounding people, whose language is a form of Bihari, Khotta Bangala, Sarawaki or Saraki. (Grierson, 78)

It is surprising to note how Grierson even included a few tribal languages into the fold of Western Bengali dialect-

The other mixed sub-dialect is spoken by the aboriginal tribe of Kharias who inhabit the hills in the south of Manbhum. The Kharias of Manbhum have abandoned their own tribal language, which belongs to the Munda family, and speak a broken Bengali. A similar dialect is spoken by the Paharias of the same neighbourhood, and the form of speech is known either as Kharia-thar or as Paharia-thar, according to the speakers... Finally, the Mal-Paharias of the centre of the Sonthal Parganas have, like the Kharias, abandoned their own Dravidian tongue, and speak a corrupt form of the language of their Bengali neighbours. They are 12, 801 in number. (Grierson, 78).

In this way, Grierson's systematic denial of language status, even to the aboriginal tribes, created a great void in the self-representational domain of these groups. As the sincere poll-bearers of Grierson's colonial paradigm, the Indian policy makers after the independence, have continued to deny independent linguistic status to all such marginalized communities. Even in the twenty-first century Cultural Research Institute of the state government or the Language Division of the Govt. of India is loath to accord language status to such aboriginal groups.

Contrary to these colonial negation of multilingual matrix, the People's Linguistic Survey of India (PLSI) has accepted the full scale language status of almost all the

neglected in Grierson's Survey. Kurmali, Kharia and Malpaharia have secured one chapter each for the documentation of their linguistic features. Besides, languages that find no mention in Grierson- Kurukh, Kora, Birhor, Bedia, Baigani, Mahali Alkhand and Lodha Sabar – have all been discussed in separate chapters with detailed linguistic description. Phonological, morphological and systematic features of Kurmali, Kharia and other excluded languages have been outlined with meticulous care. Nearly 100 independent works in Kurmali, 70 separate words in Kharia and 75 in Malpaharia have been collected to develop the vocabulary section.

The above discussion makes it clear that all these minority language groups lived on the same cultural matrix of Eastern Indian states. Yet their essential difference was never recorded as any such existence of the unknown bred fear of disruptions in the mind of colonial scholars like Grierson. Hence, this significant number of fringe – dwelling minority cultural groups cannot be denied any language identity as if they are culturally non-existent. In fact, this state of cultural 'aphasia' contributed a lot towards their exclusion from various developmental projects that aimed at preserving and promoting native cultural traditions. Whereas Santali, Bodo and a handful of tribal languages enjoyed the fruits of government funding primarily due to their inclusion in the Eighth Schedule of our constitution, no other tribal languages of eastern India received any substantial benefit from governmental initiatives.

To conclude, one must refer to the landmark essay of Ramachandra Guha, entitled 'Savaging the Civilised: Verrier Elwin and the Tribal question in Late Colonial India', to measure the quantum of apathy for tribal identity even in the independent Indian political environment. Grierson's ghost haunts our political leaders with unfailing surveillance. In the introductory lines Guha observes –

In the huge collection of records of the all India Congress Committee, housed at the Nehru Memorial Museum in New Delhi, one is hard put to find a reference to the tribals- this in contrast to the attention paid to women, untouchables and religious minorities. Curiously, this absence in the official nationalist archive is reproduced by the radical historiography of our times, which like the Congress nationalists it sets itself in opposition to- has had scarcely a word to say about tribals, this in contrast to the dozens of exegeses, scholarly and polemical, it has provided on the prehistory of the communal question, the caste question or the women's question. (Guha, 2375)

In order to historicize this neglect to minority reality Ramachandra Guha has referred to the writings of Verrier Elwin. It is precisely because by the 1940s Elwin had become the best advocate of the tribal cultural plurality for the urban Indians.

Guha focuses on Elwin's 'invention' of the aboriginal and his persistent debate with other people working on or with adivasis.

The Government of India Act of 1935 and its two provisions of creating 'excluded' and 'partially excluded' areas for tribal people raised huge controversies. Elwin was in favour of this protectionism. Otherwise, he felt that Hindu neighbours might invade the aboriginal space ruthlessly. But the concept of excluded areas was mocked as a device of anthropologists to protect aboriginals as museum curios. But the Government of India Act and the role of Elwin gave rise to a series of questions which are still pertinent in the context of marginalized tribal groups in the 21st century.

*How could one appropriately define aboriginals and understand their culture and way of life?

* How were their interests to be best protected?

* At what pace and in what way should the state allow the contact of aboriginals with the outside world?

* What were the respective roles in this regard of administrations, politicians, anthropologists, missionaries and social workers?

Verrier Elwin's *The Aboriginals* (1943) addresses these questions with profound sense of empathy for the aboriginals – an appreciation that is conspicuously absent today. Needless to say, such situations accentuate the process of endangerment. Essential failure in appreciating minority reality aggravates dissent and violence in the global context. Australian and Indian situations are but microcosmic manifestations of a larger discourse of marginalization.

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Humanising Animals/Animalising Humans: Human-Animal Metamorphosis in the folklore of Guga

Karan Singh

I

The folk landscape of North Indian epics is full of syncretic cult heroes who are a curious fusion of warrior-hood with asceticism. These ascetic heroes possess saintly attributes with a streak of military traits and in popular iconography are depicted as mounted warriors. Their equestrian rides are part of their life myths and embody an alter ego of them. A product of similar miraculous births which characterise their masters, these horses remain life-long companions and share in the vicissitudes in the life of these ascetic saints. The role of the horses in the folklores of these warrior saints can be located on diverse social, political and religious planes. While on political and cultural front they represent an amalgamation of foreign cultural elements into native society, on the social plane, these mounts become a living emblem of upward rise of subaltern society in which these heroes are located. Gugga, like Paubuji and Dev Narayan, his other two counterpart folk heroes from North India, is situated and celebrated in ritually and socially inferior classes. The aspirations of these castes for upward mobility reveals itself in symbolism connected with the amalgamation of heroic and religious signs. The horse of Guga, as part of epical attributes of power and prestige of the hero is a visible sign of strength and nobility. In folklore of Gugga the presence of horse remains an inalienable part of personal charisma of the hero. Before proceeding further, let us have a brief look at the folklore and the role of the horse in it.

Gugga, also known as Zahar Pir, bagarwala etc. was born in Dadrewa in Churu district and his Samadhi is situated in Gogameri in Sri Ganganagar district of Rajasthan. His history is intertwined with Muslim invasion and consolidation of Islam in India and William Crooke calls him a product of a time when “Indian hagiolatry was at its zenith.” (William Crooke 133) and that he was “another instance of the curious mixture of Hindu and Musalman hagiology.” (William Crooks 133) Gugga’s father ruled over Bagar country which was considered “the wild tract of half desert country extending from Hansi to the Satlaj on the west and to Bikaner on the South West” (Cunningham 80-81). The capital of this country was at Dadrewa where Jewar, father of Gugga, ruled and he had two queens Bachhal and Kachhal both of whom had no children. The queen Bachhal, whose birthplace is considered to be Sirasawa, serves Gorakhnath

faithfully and asks for a boon regarding a son: “He Guru Gorakhnathji, tum ho kirpa nidhan, Main dasi hun charan ki, puran kijo kam: dhyam charon se laun, Dijo mukh se bachan, dan putarka paun.” (Temple 131). Queen Kachhal, sister of Bachhal when comes to know about the arrival of Gorakhnath, too desires to have a child. Gorakhnath, happy with the devotion of Bachhal, agrees to give her a boon and asks her to visit in the night/morning. At an appointed hour however Kachhal deceives him by donning disguise of Bachhal and receives two fruits/grains of barley from him. He warns her not to come again as women are never satisfied in their longing for sons. When Bachhal reaches in the garden to seek boon as promised by Gorakhnath, she is abused by him roundedly as he thought that he had already given her enough blessings already. Queen Bachhal informs him that somebody has deceived him in her garb: “Koi tum ko chhal le gai, triya chanchal zat” (226-227). Gorakhnath when he realises that he has been really deceived, now blesses her with a son by gifting her Guggal and curses Kachhal that she will die at the birth of her sons/or her sons will serve that of Bachhal. Many alternative stories describe Bachhal sharing her Guggal with her mare, her sister –in-law, her Brahmini, her slave woman Luna and a sweeper woman from whom the companions of Gugga are born. These five companions of Gugga viz. his horse Javadiya/ Nilaghora, Bala, Narsingh Pande, Bhajju Kotwal and Ratanvir belonged to different castes and were celebrated in the final battle of Gugga wherein all of them except Javadiya attained martyrdom.

The marriage of Gugga plays a central episode in the svang of Gugga. Sriyal, the daughter of Raja Sanja, king of Kamrup in Assam, was betrothed to Gugga when Jewar was alive. After death of Jewar, Sanja refuses to marry his daughter to Gugga and the queen Bachhal feels sorrowful on this turn of events. The marriage is solemnized with the blessings of Guru Gorakhnath who brings Gugga and Sriyal to Bachhal. Coming on the heels of Gugga’s marriage, the conflict between Gugga and his cousins Arjan and Sarjan precipitates. Sarjan asks Gugga for his share in the property and wants half of his share. Bachhal calls this world an illusion and Surjan asks Bachhal to give him his share of property. He also asks Gugga to go for hunting. During the hunt when Gugga becomes thirsty, Arjan beguiles him with sweet words while Surjan strikes him with sword. Gugga remembers guru Gorakhnath and attacks and kills both Arjan and Surjan. He takes dead body of Arjan to his mother who is so angry with the fratricide he has committed that she curses Gugga in anger not to show her his face after it. In another and more famous account of the story, when refused by Guga to share his property, Arjan and Sarjan enlist the help of king of Delhi variously called Prithviraj/Abuphar/Anangpal and in the consequent fight Arjan and Sarjan are killed by Gugga thought at the cost of death of all his companions except his horse. When Gugga shows the heads of his cousins to his mother, she in anger refuses to see his face again. Gugga prays to goddess earth to take him or take his curse on her and he

will follow her command. Mother earth asks him to go to Rattan Haji and learn Muslim Kalima after which she will accept him. She asks Gugga to go to Ajmer where he must meet saint Kwaja Khizar and should not lie to him. Rattan Haji teaches kalima to Gugga and then Gugga returns to Goddess earth with his horse who now accepts him.

Play an important role in the present folklore about Guga. There exists a bond of consanguinity between Guga and his horse which exists as a part of divinity of the hero. The horses in the North Indian Folklores can be seen as connecting thread between two realms. They are part of the superstructure of the human existence wherein an upward tug of divinity is revealed through earthly symbols. It gives a double line of sacred and profane attributes to these horses as is traced repeatedly in relation to their riders. This dual existence at divine plane and common humanity is what marks and connects these folk heroes and their mounts both with divine plane and earthly one. Along with it, the equine relationship reveals an infusion of foreign and native elements in the folklore. While horses are seen as part of invading cultures which was introduced in India with foreign invasions beginning from Aryan forays in North-Western India, their connection with elevation in status can be read as assimilation of these cultures into aboriginal one, while retaining some of the charm and authority the equine riders brought with them.

The bond of inseparability of the horse and the saint hero is revealed through the trajectory of their life and death. Born together, they represent the same principle of life and cannot be separated. Guga buries himself under earth along with his horse and Rasalu's horse ceases to be after his death. Guga, who is commemorated with his black mare Javadia, remains inseparable in his representations with his horse. Guga immersed himself into earth with his mare when his mother asked him not to show her his face again. His inseparability with his mount, like other heroes, is unique and like him the mare too has its share in divine origin. One version of the tale makes him a foster brother of the mare wherein both are born out of the same substance which Gorakhnath gave to his mother. In this version Bacchal gave the leave containing traces of Guggal (or apple as mentioned by Oman wherein Bachhal gives one forth of apple to her mare) to her mare and from it Javadia or Leilah was born. Another version of the story is related by Crook wherein Leilah/Javadia is born of the magical barley grain given to the mare: "The mare has, of course, a story of her own, Guga had no children,- and lamenting this to his guardian deity he received from him two barley-corns, one of which he gave to his wife and the other to his famous mare who gave birth to his charger, hence known as Javadiya or "barley-born" (Crook, 134). The horses perform the role of *deus-ex-machina* wherein they come to help the hero in his dire circumstances. When Guga is attacked by the king of Delhi, in the battle Gugga's mare performs great feats: "His mare Leilah performed wonders. She literally flew about, and in one of her wild swoops the Pir's sword struck off the heads of both

his brothers at one stroke” (Oman 71).

The interrelationship between the horses and humans and their metamorphosis into each other has been part of a continuing journey with diverse attitude to this relationship existing synchronically as well as diachronically within Vedic/Epic/contemporary as well as folk/classical interplay. While it has been asserted by Heesterman as well as Doniger that there is a historic development of sacrificial object from human to horse and thence to coconut, the folklores provide a rich ground for its transformation as well as its life encounters. In its presentation of human animal entanglement the flag of Guga sheds an important light in illuminating how human and horses are viewed in these epics. The standard of Gugga is worshipped as a living emblem of the saint wherein a long bamboo pole is decorated with coloured clothes, a huge brush of peacock’s feathers and some coconuts are suspended with it. The sign of Gugga becomes a manifest representation of the saint on his horse through these symbols and captures the most important moment of his life: “this huge broom adorned with flags, fitted to a gigantic handle, and carried by a man, is transfigured into a bridegroom dressed out in his wedding garments, and seated on horseback. In fact, it represents Zahir-Pir himself on the memorable occasion of his return home with his bride, the occasion on which he slew his half-brothers and incurred the displeasure of his mother.” (74 Oman). The dressing of the pole is akin to a bridegroom getting ready for marriage procession and the disciples who carry this standard in the neighbouring villages and hamlets act as the horse of the saint. By calling themselves as horse of the saint they live the memory of Gugga. Oman vividly describes the spectacle wherein human merges its self into carrier of the saint and physically imitate its movements:

“Each “horse,” as he staggers about under the sacred burden, shouts out, “I am his horse,” while the followers cry, “Victory to Zahir-Pir.” To carry the fiction of their equine nature still further, the ‘ horses ‘ are actually made to eat some gram (a pulse on which horses are fed in India) and a few blades of green grass. Wrought upon by the drumming and shouting, the “horses“ imitate the pawing of a spirited steed, and prance about as much as the weight of the pole and their own strength will permit ; but should they begin to caper too much, the Bhaggat smacks his whip, made of iron chains mounted on an iron handle.” (Oman 75)

In this construction of human disciples into horses, there are parallels between Guga’s cult and that of Khandoba, as noted by Sontheimer: “During Dasara at Devatagudda (Karnataka), the devotees gallop like horses whipping themselves with horsewhips, [...] and even at the *Somvati Amavasya* festival in Jejuri one may see devotees possessed by the power of the god moving similarly like horses in front of

the palanquin” (Sontheimer 116).

Another important transformation in the folklore is revealed through relationship between Guga and serpent race, represented by Basak/Vasuki and Tatig/Takshak. In a story narrated by Elwyn Lapoint, Guga is reincarnation of Janmejaya, the grandson of Abhimanyu whose enmity with serpents is part of epic Mahabharata. In this story, Tatig is sent by Basak to help Guga in his marriage with Siriyal, but only after Guga effectively threatens and humbles Tatig in his first encounter with him during his childhood. The transformation of Tatig into a Brahmin and later on his biting of Siriyal so as to bring about a union between Guga and Siriyal reveals easy transition of human-animal barrier by the anthropomorphic imagination. Further Naga as autochthonic people and their relationship with horse, as revealed in murals surrounding Guga, present a complex interaction between the native tribes and foreign invaders. Doniger asserts in this connection: “The local evil is the native snake of the soil, trampled by the equine, solar invader. [...] This is an otherness not loathed but admired, not despised but coveted; it is an otherness that has been assimilated into the native system of values” (Doniger 93). The submission of serpent before the horse riding hero leads to an understanding of process not only a synthesis of native and foreign but also their contestation and transformation.

II

The animal and human interaction in the folklore referred to in this paper opens up many interesting questions. The animals and their transformations play a cardinal role in the North Indian folklores as is evident in the verbal space as well as thematic importance given to them in the narration. For one thing, they are part of these lores as a listening voice, as a substitute for the audience and thus maintain in giving the narration a listening ear, making the hero reveal information about diverse incidents. That this function of prompter acts on the level of a novice makes these animals a valuable part of narrating process as no human being could fill the function of these animals.

Secondly, one can trace a connection between animals and humans as presented in these epics to an ancient belief in the oneness of all life forms. This view of life as permeating through all, without distinctions of human specificity was noted by early European thinkers who were prone to reject it as a mark of superstition and primitive nature of Indian society: “no savage fixes the boundary line between man and the lower forms of animal life so definitely as more civilised races are wont to do. The animal, in their belief, has very much the same soul, much the same feelings and passions as men have, a theory exemplified in the way the Indian ploughman speaks to his ox or the shepherd calls his flock. To him the belief is familiar that the spirits of his ancestors appear in the form of animals” (Crook 315). The exploration of this bond now-a-days under rubrics of post modernism makes use aware of an existence of

alternate belief systems, which effectively challenges the hegemony of rationality as an exclusive faculty of human mind. The earlier belief in human/animal binary rose with ascendancy of enlightenment in the European continent and gradually spread to other continents leading to suppression and rejection of animistic belief systems in different cultures across Asia and Africa. Its relegation to the arena of superstition and primitivism has been one of the ironies of human civilization wherein the acceptance of alternative possibilities was rejected by human search for material progress under Industrial-scientific revolution, thus circumscribing human search for a fuller life wherein animal human conversations played an important role.

As a prerequisite of the saint hero, animals like horses need to partake of both the martial as well as saintly qualities. The divine birth of the horses as well as their connection with the saintly heroes becomes part of the scheme through which they are separated from common run of ordinary mortality. Another movement which these horses share with their masters is their separation from society and life of seclusion. The attribution of sacrality often needs a seclusion, a middle state wherein some attributes of common life are renounced. It can be seen in case of human horses of Gugga where the disciples are required to separate themselves from human passion before they can become horse of the saint: “all the “horses” are required to undergo a sort of purificatory penance for a month previous to the ceremony. They are required to abstain from all indulgences, and to sleep not on a bed of any kind, but on the bare floor, alone, and quite apart from all other members of the family. When in attendance on the standard, they are expected to keep their minds free from carnal thoughts and desires”. (Oman 78)

In conclusion, it can be inferred that the epical story of Guga problematise relationship between humans and animals through their frequent transformation into each other. Through the horses and the heroes an objective correlative to the existence of pulls of impulses of sainthood and warrior hood has been provided in the folklore. The smooth transition from one to another reveals an understanding that saints and heroes in Indian cultural often do not exist in isolation and are complementary to each other. By mounting on them, saints becomes heroes and the existence of these horses as a speaking companion to them provides an aura of divinity to these saints. A horse as a physical symbol of elevation represents a reflection of the upward mobility of the low caste in which the hero is worshipped and brings with it a greater acceptability, ritually and socially. It is in its attributes of martiality and transgression of rigidified caste functions that Doniger calls it the “subversive association of the horse with untouchable sweepers” (Doniger 91). Further, interrelation between serpents- humans, serpents-horses bring out historicity of cultural conflicts and its impression on the mobility of cultural symbols through which invaders and natives understood each other by redefining two cultural matrixes.

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‘Individuation’ of Achille in *Omeros* : A Jungian Reading*

Ruchi Singh

Consciousness, Unconsciousness, and Individuation

In his book *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Carl Gustav Jung, a Swiss psychoanalyst, defined ‘Individuation’ as “the becoming of the self” (Jung 1981:35). He further amplified his definition in his subsequent essays, individuation as “development of the self, (that) lies in the identification of ego-consciousness with the self” (Jung 1981:145), “...the maturation process of personality induced by the analysis of the unconscious” (Jung 1981:159), a process through which a person becomes a psychological ‘individual’, an indivisible unity or ‘whole’ (Jung 1981:275). To put it together, individuation means to make the consciousness aware of the unconsciousness and to accept one’s self with all its strengths and limitations, in their entirety. It is a process of self-actualisation, where an individual becomes a ‘whole’ concurrently distinct from others. Jung proposed that individuation is the primary process in the development of the human psyche and emphasised the primary importance of the individual psyche and the personal quest for ‘wholeness’ in his Analytical Psychology.

According to Jung, the structure of psyche is made up of consciousness, personal unconsciousness and the collective unconsciousness. The conscious mind is a depository of all the thoughts, feelings, emotions, relationships, identity, everything and everyone the person is cognisant of. The personal unconscious has contents specific to an individual. It contains the memories, thoughts, feelings, ideas, that have been wishfully forgotten or repressed. They have been acquired by an individual from his childhood, adolescent past and other psychological factors. They are repressed if considered incompatible but there is a possibility of keeping them conscious once they have been recognized. Various ‘complexes’ associated with a personality come from this personal unconscious. These often correspond to the ‘shadow’ that an individual meets in his dreams or fantasies. Therefore, the consciousness and the personal unconscious constitutes those portions that are acquired.

*This Jungian reading of Derek Walcott’s magnum opus, *Omeros* was first published in *Muse India* journal edited by Dr. Jaydeep Sarangi. It is being re-published with due permission.

The conscious and the personal unconscious rest upon an inherited unconscious psychic dispositions which Jung calls the collective unconscious or impersonal or transpersonal unconscious. It is the storehouse of the repressed memories of an individual coupled with the memories of his ancestral past. The collective, unlike personal unconscious, is universal. This is the reason for resemblances in the unconscious processes, like motifs, symbols and rituals, of the most widely separated peoples and races. They are neither driven from personal experiences nor acquired. These are inherited from ancestors.

The collective unconsciousness has archetypal language that expresses itself through imagery, fantasies and symbols. For Jung, archetypes consist of universal, mythic characters that reside within the collective unconscious of people the world over. These archetypes represent fundamental human motifs of experience and evoke deep emotions, when confronted by the conscious. Jung registers these archetypes as the Self, the shadow, anima and animus, the Persona, the father, the mother, the child, the wise old man, the hero, the maiden and the trickster.

Achille's Conscious Self

The conscious self of Achille unfolds in Book I of *Omeros*. Achille is a fisherman positioned, with many others on the island, within the Caribbean landscapes, its pastiche culture and rituals, creole language and religion, and other political and economic realities of the world of St. Lucia. The mongrelisation of the Caribbean is a constant reminder of the lost race, lost religion, lost identity, lost language of his ancestors. The destruction of the trees, their cutting and falling in the beginning of the poem, symbolically suggest the destruction of everything primordial in the process of colonisation. The name of the island has changed and none remembers the original name. The tribal gods have been replaced by the single Christian God, "the river was (also) satisfied./ It was a god too" (Walcott 1990:54). People only have Christian names, they have no memory of their original names. Afolabe, who later appears in Achille's dream as his father, lets himself be renamed, without any resistance, by the admiral of the ship. "The bearded elders endured the decimation/of their tribe without uttering a syllable/of that language they had uttered as one nation"(Walcott 1990:6). In the process their native language is lost and the descendant Afro-Caribbeans do not use the language of their forefathers. Achille is agonized to see only the ruins of history left behind, if at all they can be called history. Too much had been forgotten and all he can see is "a white, amnesiac Atlantic...with old African signs." (Walcott 1990:61). History has been rewritten and revised by those who captured St. Lucia. Achille studied "a heaven whose cosmology had been erased/by the crossing." (Walcott 1990:113). Achille is consciously tormented by the transformation landscape of St. Lucia and mindscape of its multicultural inhabitants. "The young took no interest in canoes/That was longtime

shit. Once it came from Africa,” (Walcott 1990:112) Like the sea will get accustomed to the noise of the new generation, the new generation has already got accustomed to the new world. They have no historical regret, it is a denial of racial trauma and inhuman slavery. Achille envied Seven Seas who could not see what was happening to the village that “was dying in its change” (Walcott 1990:111). As the canoes entered the sea they “agreed with the waves to forget their lives as tree” (Walcott 1990:8). He listened to ‘Soul brothers’ losing their soul. Achille is consciously informed that in the process of displacement the ancestors were able to retain and pass down only fragments of their African identity. He is traumatised by the loss of the African identity. Simultaneously, conscious of the ruin of St. Lucia, he laments that the island is undergoing transformation, the kind least desired by him and many others, like Philoctete, Ma Kilman, Seven Seas, even Major Plunkett.

Achille shares a violent love-hate relationship with the black and beautiful Helen, who also represents the island St. Lucia. “Her stubbornness/made him crazy” (Walcott 1990:38) and as he violently ripped her dress apart, “Achille felt his body drained of all the pride it/contained” (Walcott 1990:39) unable to hide his tears and pain. He is tormented by his betrayal. His lost faith in Helen has left him restless. Achille treats Helen with arrogance, humiliated her often. Being a lover, he dreaded her nights in the cafe. His love is accompanied by intense jealousy and hatred. He refuses to participate in the Friday night revelry out of his resentment. He questions her behaviour often, thinking her to be like a whore who can be won only with money. As he fights with Hector over Helen he realises “The rage that he felt against Hector/was shame” (Walcott 1990:17). What exasperates him further is the thought that “Men can kill/their own brothers in rage,” (Walcott 1990:17). As Helen moves in with Hector, forlorn Achille feels lonely and as rotten as Philoctete’s wound. Helen’s independent attitude and consequent pride vexes him. Achille is bereft of peace because of his inability to possess Helen completely. Achille’s association with St. Lucia is epitomised in his relationship with Helen who also represents the St. Lucia in *Omeros*. His inability to possess Helen and anger is reflected in his conflict with the fragmented world and hybrid identity of the Caribbean. Achille has drifted away from both, the island and his beloved Helen. He is alienated from both.

After a laurel tree has been cut, in the beginning of the poem, Achille looks up at the hole that the cutting of the laurel had left “He saw the hole silently healing with the foam” (Walcott 1990:6), a process he will himself will experience later in the book. He saw a swift, a migratory bird, “far from its home” (Walcott 1990:6) metaphorically representing Achille, who is away from ‘home’ and conscious about the fact. The heel of the swift gripped in the horn is Achille gripped in amnesia. Achille frees the bird, also symbolic of his future, where he will free himself from amnesia. Achille carves a cross on trees, a symbol of shame and suffering as well as redemption, hinting at his

future of being redeemed from the racial amnesia and ensuing affliction. Achille feels dead with no work at sea. As soon as he goes back to his fisherman job, he feels the joy and his spirits are uplifted on seeing the swift like a sunlit omen.

Achille's Unconscious Self

The unconsciousness of Achille is formed by the collective racial memory. In his dream vision, Achille goes on a spiritual journey to his ancestral home, Africa. In "the Atlantic now, this great design/of the triangular trade" (Walcott 1990:129) he sees "some white memory/of a midshipman coming up close to the hull,/a white turning body, and this water go fill/with them...all corpses wrapped like the sail," (Walcott 1990:129). Achille sees the bodies of young Plunkett, drowned fishermen whom he recognised but could not recall their names, and unaccounted African slaves who died in the Middle Passage. As the number of decomposed, bleached and disfigured corpses multiplied in tens and hundreds, his soul sickened. As Achille sees the body of his father "Then, for the first time, he asked himself who he was." (Walcott 1990:130). The floating corpses were the phantasms of his ancestors risen upto the surface of the Atlantic, summoning up the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade. The sunstroke has triggered a reverse Middle Passage and its horrors. Since the Caribbean Islands are populated by slaves brought from Africa through the Atlantic, the Middle Passage lies at the heart of their collective unconsciousness. The Middle Passage has separated the tribal Africans from their homelands, language, religion and cultural practices. Achille feels the unexplained tribal sorrow at the loss of African identity which even intoxication cannot drown. The chasm in his identity, hitherto dormant in his unconscious, now surfaces. The amnesia caused to the later generations of the survivors of the Middle Passage becomes pertinent.

The sea swift was towing the pirogue and "once Achille had questioned his name and its origin", the bird "touched both worlds with her rainbow" (Walcott 1990:130) and Achille "felt he was headed home" (Walcott 1990:131). As he enters the mangroves, the swift screeching is the last sound he heard from the 'other world' that is Caribbean. As he sails with the river's flow, Achille sees the images of mangroves, hippopotamus, crocodile, like the ones he had seen in African movies and yelped at in childhood. He also experiences the contrary feeling to scream, wanted the brown water to harden into road. In his stupor, he heard the God, saying that sea swift has been sent as a pilot to take Achille home. Swift whose wings is the sign of crucifixion represent the shame and redemption. The God warns him, he would have no God if he forgets His commandments. This is an assertion of Achille's religious (Christian) identity that has assimilated into the unconscious. While his Christian God asserts itself, he is unable to recall the name of the river and the tree god, the pirogue, "his homecoming canoe" in whose body he steered to the settlement of his ancestors. The conflict of religious

identity is quite conspicuous and shows his anxiety to find his place in Africa, to claim back the African God. Once again “Achille felt the homesick shame and pain of his Africa” (Walcott 1990:134) and weeps

Finally, Achille reaches an African settlement where he is followed by a crowd curiously tugging at his different looking clothes and body. He witnesses the ghost of his father and in the similarity of features he “saw two worlds mirrored there” (Walcott 1990: 136), symbolically a self realisation of his two identities. A conversation follows between Achille and his father. Afolabe’s primary concern is to discover his son’s lost name. Within the tribe, each name and each sound, signifies a quality, a virtue, that is associated with trees, a river, or a person. Without that connotation, Afolabe explains, a thing is meaningless, a person is nothing. Everything revolves around a name. Achille is unable to give any etymology of his name, he says, “In the world I come from/we accept the sounds we are given.” (Walcott 1990:138). The tribe grieves at his amnesia and the fear of oblivion. Though Achille does not understand the difference between being called out by a name or by a sound, he yearns for the sound that is missing, expressing his desire to explore his roots. Afolabe instructs his son in the essential relationship of each name and the unique shadow it casts. To forget names is to forget one’s identity. To be called out by a sound is to be nothing. The fact that Achille “still do not care to know” (Walcott 1990:138) the meaning of the sound ‘Achille’ is once again an assertion of his St. Lucian identity.

Achille learns to chew in the ritual of kola nut, drink palm-wine, and heard the stories of the griot of triumphal sorrow. One of the stories was about a man from their tribe whose punishment for a blasphemous offence was that he forgot his parents, his tribe, and his own spirit, for other god. He was scarred so badly with this amnesia that he wanted to disinherit himself. He moaned to be back with the intertwined, deeply rooted interconnected lives of his tribe. This man symbolically represents Achille himself. In his conscious state he mourns for the loss of his native African identity.

Achille understands the language the tribesmen spoke about his future, a future he knew but could not speak about it to his own people, his own father. As he recites the names of his tribal gods, even the trees within hearing, ignored his incantation. It is the chasm, the void in his tribal identity. He is unable to connect with his own people and surroundings. In spite of being surrounded by his people, Achille feels estranged. Sitting near the river, he sees everything, the anchored canoe, the pier stakes, the trees, all looked the same in their reflections in the river, “but the shadow face/ swayed by the ochre ripples seemed homesick/for the history ahead, as if its proper place/lay in settlement.” (Walcott 1990:140) His divided reflection is his divided self. His participation in their rituals does not make him feel less estranged which further increased his sorrows. To make it his home Achille will have to forget his future, that is his

Caribbean identity as he says “Make me happier,/make me forget the future” (Walcott 1990:141). The hybridity, rootlessness, mongrel culture of his Caribbean identity are too deep rooted in psyche to be denied. The African life has been left far behind in these three centuries.

As Achille witnesses the local dances with bamboo sticks, the drink, the clothes, the tools, the skirts, calabash mask, the musical instruments, he recognises in them origins of St. Lucian customs and devices. The same as is in his ‘home’ in St. Lucia. Everything he found was “rooted” deeply, the roots intertwining the entire tribe. But there was a difference, everything here was rooted, unlike everything in his world which is rootless.

Achille experiences the appalling brutality of slave trade. An African village is raided by the slave hunters. “The raid was profitable. It yielded fifteen slaves to the slavers waiting up the coast.” (Walcott 1990:145). He felt the anger and the remorse, the will to change the future but he could not do anything. He felt helpless as he could neither fight nor hide. As he climbed up a hill top, Achille saw the chain of men linked by their wrists with vines. They moved in a line like ants. “Their whole world was moving,/ or a large part of the world, and what began dissolving / was the fading sound of their tribal name for the rain,.../ and always the word “never”, and never the word “again.” (Walcott 1990:152).

When Achille sees another African, a member of the group that raided the village, rage swells up and Achille brutally kills the man and then sobs “with grief/at the death of a brother” (Walcott 1990:148). This brings into perspective what Walcott had said in an interview with Brown and Johnson that slavery began with black people capturing black people and selling them to the white man. Achille is now aware that Africans were not only the victims but also exploited. He saw a dog, a child and Seven Seas sitting in the abandoned village, all of them have disappeared. Achille heard “the griot muttering his prophetic song/ of sorrow that would be the past” (Walcott 1990:148). He tells the future of those taken away as the slaves. They will cross the transatlantic, experience the trauma the triangular passage and on the white sands they will yearn for their home, remembering their rooted lives.

Achille also experiences the pain and suffering of these Africans slaves, the trauma of their loss of place, of being in exile and the formation of New World and new identities. Though all of them were taken in different directions. Like reverberation they “went the Ashanti one way, the Mandingo another,/ the Ibo another, the Guinea. Now each man was a nation/ in himself, without mother, father , brother.” (Walcott 1990:150). To keep themselves alive in the memories of the future generation, they carved their fading names on the wood, each carrying his own burden to the other world. After going through the trauma of the Middle passage they landed on sand.

They might have been taken to separate worlds “Yet they felt the sea-wind tying them into one nation/ of eyes and shadows and grans, in the one pain/ that is inconsolable, the loss of one’s shore” (Walcott 1990:151). In their pain, they have cried not only for their loved one, their tribesmen, but also for their flora and fauna. They complained to their gods for not helping them when needed. As a very large part of their world moved “what began dissolving/ was the fading sound of their tribal name for the rain,/ the bright sound for the sun, a hissing sound for the river, and always the word “never”, and never the word “again.” (Walcott 1990:152)

Individuation process of Achille

The process of individuation is set in motion by the stimulation of the unconscious. The heat stroke induces stasis and he enters into a state of trance. The reverse journey, both spatial and temporal, and the African experience, summons up the horror of the Middle Passage, conjuring the brutality of the slave trade and initiates Achille into his African identity. Achille’s African experience is a part of the racial memory, collective unconsciousness of the Africans, the racial psyche.

Jung distinguishes between ‘personal dreams’ and ‘collective dreams.’ The ‘collective dreams’ come from the realm of the collective unconscious and are archetypal in nature. The ‘collective dreams’ occur as a part of individuation process. The collective unconsciousness has archetypal language that expresses itself through imagery, fantasies and symbols. According to Jung, the process of individuation results in identification of these archetypes. These archetypes are the journey, shadow, anima/ animus, the wise old man, father, the mother, the child and the Self.

These Jungian archetypes become the source of the symbolic productions in Achille’s dream that gradually bring the fragmentary aspects of the his personality closer to totality through the unification of his unconscious with his conscious. The journey itself is a descent to the underworld equated with to the unexplored realm of the unconscious, in psychology. Achille undertakes journey through sea to trace his history and African identity. The sea symbolises the realm of the unconscious. Individuation begins with his symbolic journey. Father archetype is an authoritative and powerful figure. Achille considers the question of his identity first time when he witnesses the ghost of his father. Afolabe initiates his son into his forgotten tribal identity, encourages Achille to reclaim his African name and identity. The wise old man is a spiritual archetype who gives good advice and understanding into events when needed. The griot narrates the sufferings of the African slaves through the triangular passage. Achille is purged by going through the same pain. Seven Seas, who also appears in the dream, represents wisdom and has prophesied Achille’s journey to Africa. Syzygy is the combination of the anima/animus (female/male component) in an individual coming closest to ‘wholeness.’ Achille is introduced to his anima through

a ritual of his forefathers in which male members of tribe dress up as a woman, representing the warrior woman, the figure of androgyne signifying the union of the conscious and the unconscious of Achille. When the anima, with positive traits, is allowed to express herself through a man's psyche, she brings the attributes of love, tenderness, compassion, commitment and creativity, thereby expanding the personality. The realisation of anima brings closer to the 'Self.' This good anima reflects in Achille's relationship with his beloved Helen as well as St. Lucia. He has accepted Helen, with all her arrogance and pride, and her child even if it was Hector's. The child archetype has been associated to the beginnings, birth and salvation by Jung. Achille sees a child with his dog, a symbol of loyalty, in the ruins of the village. The child symbolises his beginning of a new life on his return and salvation from the curse of racial amnesia. All these archetypes bring Achille to his 'Self.'

The process of individuation leads to the realisation of the 'Self' which becomes known when the conscious integrates with the unconscious, representing the image of 'wholeness' emanating unity in personality. The 'Self' or wholeness does not appear in form of a specific Jungian archetype, instead exhibits itself in gradual transformation of Achille through a deeper understanding of his unconscious that is his ancestral history. Achille knows his genealogy, his tribal culture, its rituals, language and religion. This knowledge depicts his justified pride in his origins. His knowledge of the events that led to the formation of the Caribbean population, its culture and its language has enabled him to comprehend the reason for complex nature of Caribbean society. As he landed on shores of St. Lucia, he heard the song, a Marley reggae "Buffalo soldier" and he could see a smoky buffalo and its black rider and as "the black soldier turned his face, and it was Achille's." The song traces the roots of the Afro-race, it reiterates the theme of emancipation of the self from mental slavery and shame of race (skin colour). It is assertion of their identity, both native and hybrid and their contribution in the making of the lands to which they were brought. Bob Marley is an icon for the Afro-race, the descendants of African slaves. Actualization of the 'Self' generates mental and emotional healing of Achille. His conscious is in harmony with his unconscious. He comes back with memory but the pain that was with him when taking the journey, was gone because "they crossed, they survived. There is the epical splendour." (Walcott 1990:149). Most importantly, individuation process has informed him that Africa is not his 'home' anymore. His knowledge of African life does not make him African. Reclaiming the past helps Achille to comprehend his St. Lucian identity as an integral member of its Creole culture. Achille, a transformed self, is liberated "not from roots in Africa but from bondage to the idea of his place in Africa." (Wilson-Tagoe 1998: 265). Achille accepts his identity as a transplanted man of the New World. The unification of Achille's conscious self (Caribbean identity), has blended with his unconscious self (African identity) initiating the development of his personality

in its 'wholeness.' Achille finds roots in rootlessness and harmony in the chaotic hybrid world of St. Lucia.

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Rumour as performance: Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow* and the Peripheral Ontology of Postcolonialism

Prodosh Bhattacharya

The word 'rumour' calls forth through its utterance a wide range of concerns regarding its definition. To the obvious question that is pursued- "What is rumour?" – a tendentious claim is made by collative semantics. To such effect 'rumour' is defined as a proposition or belief in general circulation within a community without proof or evidence of its authenticity. A significant word that emerges is "circulation", as an essential aspect that problematizes the concept. This paper seeks to look into the concept of rumour as a 'peripheral' mode of performance, relating it to the peripheral ontology of Postcolonialism.

The mythical roots of 'rumour' harks one back to Roman mythology in the figure of 'Fama', the goddess of 'Rumour', and in Virgil's *Aeneid* (Book IV) she is imaginatively conceived as a swift birdlike monster with as many eyes, lips, tongues and ears as feathers travelling on the ground but with her head in the clouds. However it is in a certain dismantling of the mythical frame that the viable 'circulation' of rumour becomes both a cognitive object and a process located in the greater trajectory of orality in culture. This would entail locating rumour in the broader perspective of memory, storytelling, and oral forms of cultural transmission. The notion of memory though may participate in a collective narrative of a community has a mode in the individuating narrative of a storyteller that makes it as - 'a map of identity'. Perhaps a more illuminating phrase for conceiving the orality of 'rumour' is 'a map of identifications', as a space that engages a variety of issues and fields of analysis. The cartography of such space suggests an ethos that moves out of the geographical (though not quite abandoning it) to the epistemological and invokes a certain anxiety of ephemeral representation. The prospect of such an endeavour finds a suitable fiction in Jorge Luis Borges's "On Exactitude in Science"-

... In that Empire, the Art of Cartography attained such Perfection that the map of a single Province occupied the entirety of a City, and the map of the Empire, the entirety of a Province. In time, those Unconscionable Maps no longer satisfied, and the Cartographers Guilds struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it. The following Generations, who were not so fond of the Study

of Cartography as their Forebears had been, saw that that vast Map was Useless, and not without some Pitilessness was it, that they delivered it up to the Inclemencies of Sun and Winters. In the Deserts of the West, still today, there are Tattered Ruins of that Map, inhabited by Animals and Beggars; in all the Land there is no other Relic of the Disciplines of Geography. (Miranda 153)

The compelling postmodern idiom of substituting the part for the whole in its literal sense, seems justifiably cogent in the postcolonial discursive field. It is here that 'rumour' is un-rumoured, unhinged from its static mythification into a dynamic of interlocking discourses and a certain fragmentary volatility of its own form. The narrative of 'rumour' exceeds and exhausts the thematic of 'rumour' thereby enacting a meta-metonymic transfer of its contextual engagements. To such an effect, concerns regarding the form, transmission and functions of rumours seem more significant than issues about its origin and its status in the binary concerns of truth/falsity.

A consideration of the issues of form, transmission and functions of rumours liberates the notion into the spectrum of questions and speculations surrounding it, which are themselves formed in the discursive disciplines of social psychology, folklore studies, anthropology, narratology and many more. It is in this spectral web of discursivity that the notion of 'Performance', as a field of activity, rather than a discipline, throws open insightful queries, invested in a 'futures' - as a substantial ontological category of disciplines and disciplinarity. Rumour then to a considerable extent, is as much potentially a 'verb' as it is essentially a noun and accordingly it is also proper to ask how rumour comes to be and operates.

The whole range of implications that comes up in looking at rumour as performance, does bring with it a strain of anxiety regarding the viability of the term 'performance' in negotiating the concept of 'rumour'. The anxiety is borne out of a tendency to think of 'performance' as 'performance art' and therefore an expected anti-theatrical prejudice furthers a critique of such consideration as a reductionist point of view reflecting bourgeois pedagogical patterns of engagement. A possible point of clarification is that 'Performance' covers a much broader horizon beyond the realms of theatre research into that of social sciences. With emergence of Performance Studies in the 1960s and 70s a range of topical interests from various areas of disciplinary study began to merge, often contesting commonly held theories about the separated domains of reality and fiction, naturalistic behaviour and artistic performance, the world and the stage and similar binary oppositions. In turning to Richard Schechner, one finds in the penumbra of 'Performance' a greater field of relations-

To treat any object, work, or product "as" performance – a painting, a novel, a shoe, or anything at all – means to investigate

what the object does, how it interacts with other objects or beings, and how it relates to other objects or beings. Performances exist only as actions, interactions, and relationships.(30)

Performance then is not ‘in’ anything as much it is ‘in-between’ and more than being ‘set apart’ from society it is always already embedded in it. ‘Performance’ as an arena of critical analysis doesn’t ask questions so much about art, as it asks of life, art-like questions. The central questions about ‘rumour’ as ‘performance’ tend to two larger issues, of its 1) transmission and 2) the effectiveness of naming, gathering and analysing them.

The notion of transmission brings into critical purview the un-patterned spatio-temporal phenomena of rumour and its workings. While rumours can be historicised there is no definite historicity of it owing to a certain epistemic murkiness of the operative field of rumour. This is precisely also a reason why rumour does have contemporaneity in all temporal paradigms of society and spatial aspect of social relations. Its avenues are not geometrical but nomadic and rhizomatic. In that light of thought the idea of ‘social drama’ as evinced by Victor Turner enlightens one to estimate ways in which rumour as performance is a mode of ‘liminality’ in the drama that a society enacts, in its transformation from one form to another, usually with a certain amount of social conservatism. Sutton-Smith argues-

The normative structure represents the working equilibrium, the “anti-structure” represents the latent system of potential alternatives from which novelty will arise when contingencies in the normative system require it. We might correctly call this second system protocultural system because it is the precursor of innovative normative forms. It is the source of new culture. ⁽¹⁵⁷⁾

In post-industrial worlds the liminal gives way to ‘liminoid’¹ activities into marking sites of a more radical subversive frame that makes way for a new fostering of community and social relations. Rumours then can indeed find a social agency from its primitive to modern ritualisations and account for tribal as well as post-digital technological cultures. It is in this trajectory of critical approximations that Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s “Wizard of the Crow” presents itself in the ‘globolectic imagination’² and marks the course of ‘rumour’ as both liminal and ‘liminoid’ enveloped in oral performances.

The novel through its strategic narration through the initial voice of a narrator opens up centrifugally to the multiple voices in the novel, all in ways either contributing or trying to counter the series of rumours that become in the course of the novel solidified into narrative strategies. The novel begins in the proleptic citation of the possible rumours, the veracity of which all lie later in the narrative as enacted transmission

and trans-creation of oral hidden transcript in an active and interactive circulation — “There were many theories about the strange illness of the second Ruler of the Free Republic of Aburiria, but the most frequent on people’s lips were five” (3).

It is this setting forth of ‘rumours’ that prepare its readers almost in the diegetic level of utterance. The readers enter the modality and the medium of rumour in the textual performance of narrator’s voice that pre-empt a sense of weakness and finitude of power of the dictatorial ‘Ruler’. The five rumours enumerated reflect in turn what Tamotsu Shibutani calls ‘Improvised News’, as interpretations that speakers actively generate in the wake of a social crisis and pass on in the iterable strain of performances built as responses to the social and the political milieu in which they are circulated. All of these rumours while ephemeral and fragmentary gain a certain credible force amongst the people of Aburiria by repeating actions as ‘twice-behaved behaviours.’ (Schechner 3)

The first of the most frequent rumors about the Ruler’s illness claims that “[t]he illness ... was born of anger that once welled up inside him” that he tried to get rid off but that “would not go away, and it continued simmering inside till it consumed his heart” (3). Robert Colson observes —

The source of this anger might be any of several events that will appear later in the novel, including the disruption of the birth-day/ Marching to Heaven celebration by the Movement for the Voice of the People (which marks the first suspected coup d’état of the novel) and the Ruler’s frustrat-ing visit to America. In both cases, these events represent the acknowledgment of two challenges to the Ruler’s authority, one by the citizens of Aburiria and one by the brokers of global power.(142)

A tyrannical and oppressive engagement of the ruler remains alleviating his fits of boredom –

“..followed by some national drama: his enemies were lashed in the public square with a *sjambok*, whole villages were blown to bits or people were pierced to death by a bows-and-arrows squad, their carcasses left in the open as food for hyenas and vultures” (Thiong’o 4).

It is precisely the oppressive violence perpetrated by the State as the body-politic of the ‘Ruler’ that proliferates the numerous rumours as ways of handling the panic of terror and brings forth the anti-structural liminal politics of performing through invoking stories ,beliefs, legends in the mode of the active and transpiring ‘rumour’. The second rumour posits a “curse from the cry of a wronged he-goat” as the cause of the king’s illness. This goat was supposed to serve as a treatment for the “sight of blood flooding

the land”, however it escaped before the medicine man could finish the necessary rituals. The goat “cried grief across the land, until the Ruler heard the cry and, learning about the curse, which he imagined to be a call for a coup, sent soldiers to hunt down the he-goat and all involved.”

Luise White in her book *Speaking with Vampires: Rumour and History in Colonial Africa* makes an important observation regarding vampire stories that circulated in the mode of rumour among the ordinary folk of Kenya-

An African politician recalled that in 1952, a man returned to his home area in central Kenya, much to the surprise of his neighbors: “He had been missing since 1927. We thought he had been slaughtered by the Nairobi Fire Brigade between 1930–1940 for his blood, which we believed was taken for use by the Medical Department for the treatment of Europeans with anaemic diseases... I want to interrogate and contextualize these stories for what was in them: I want to contextualize all their power, all their loose ends, and all their complicated understandings of firemen and equipment and anemia, so that they might be used as a primary source with which to write, and sometimes rewrite, the history of colonial East and Central Africa. I argue that it is the very inaccurate jumble of events and details in these stories that makes them such accurate historical sources: it is through the convoluted array of overalls and anemia that Africans described colonial power.” (White n.pag.)³

To ‘contextualise all its power’, one must turn to the use of the performative utterances as J.L Austin demonstrates. Austin characterises performative utterances as that which bear not any relation to its truth or falsity but rather to the way the word ‘does’ something or the other. Rumours in their utterances foster a sense of community, through a certain force of enacting credible transmissions of knowledge.

Robert H. Jackson and Carl G. Rosberg, in *Personal rule in Black Africa*, describe the dictators’ regimes as:

Clearly the uncertainty of personal rule affects the ruler more than anybody else. It is with him every day in the sense that he rules not by institutional right but by personal domination, intelligence, energy, and fortune. . . . [He] may rule for many years, but there is always a possibility that legitimacy will be lost, that ability and loyalty will decline, and that misfortune will overtake[him].⁽²⁷⁾

It is precisely a fear of losing power, and control that marks his series of violent actions culminating in a language of 'capture' - capturing his wife who challenges his holy masculinity based on the rumours about the profane infamies of the 'Ruler' involving young schoolgirls, which forms a major part of the fourth theory of rumour about his illness, and in its extreme involves the endeavour of the psychopathic 'Ruler' to arrest time and any sense of a futurity that marks a finitude of his reign.

To pursue Robert Colson's view-

He decides that "what he did to Rachael he would do to Aburiria . . . freeze or abolish the future of [the] country" (750). He probably has no preference between a frozen or abolished future. His concern is that the future never come; unfortunately for him, the sun is about to set and the end is near, for him and for the novel. For within just a few pages, a successful coup takes place and Aburiria meets its third Ruler, Tajirika, whose promise of "imperial democracy" (754) sounds an ominous note for the future."(140)

The fifth theory of the rumour sustains a ritual dimension with the 'Ruler' enacting a secret ceremony of bathing in his enemies' blood and paying a visit to the secret chamber of his 'State House' to converse with the exhibits of the museum like room- that comprises of the 'bone sculptures' of his enemies. However the hidden oral transcript of rumours circulate a narrative fragment of the 'Ruler' being deserted by the daemons that he had housed in the special chamber of his State House. Through the mechanism of a rumour's reliance on rumour itself an ephemeral transmission of the idea of a failed shamanistic praxis by the head of the State thereby suggesting an impending vulnerability gains a considerable momentum in mobilising the 'Movement for the Voice of the People' catalysed by the dual efforts of the male and female counterparts of the figure of the 'wizard'.

Wizardry functions in the novel in the paradigm of the trickster, or the 'signifyin(g) monkey' as referred to by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. The notion of magic and wizardry is not so much about the occult in this novel. It is rather a pluralistic and democratic spirit that is activated through the mode of performance that envelops the oral dimension of the fiction into a subversive theatre of politics. Both the characters of Kamiti and Nyawira through their performative utterances and disguises appropriate body-languages of a job hunter, an official in work, beggars who adopt a language of protest as a way of exposing the phallogentric project of establishing a relic of power, through what might be called an exposition of "The Edifice Complex"⁴ and finally to wizardry that heals through utterances.

A potential doubt regarding fictionalising mechanisms that concern not only the

neo-colonial hegemonic nation-state of Africa but also the post-colonial state in the era of globalization, must necessarily find its answers in not merely locating the space of the postcolonial as a textual realm, but more as an active performance realm the semiotics of which has the added dimension of 'liveness'.

In the context of Haiti and its political struggle Glen A. Perice says-

Reports of Francois Duvalier's power give testimony not only to the power of magic but to the power of rumor itself. In telling these tales about Duvalier in the present, historical imagination itself becomes ensorcelled in the magic of authoritarian state power. "He did steal children, he did!" a secretary in Port-au-Prince told me about Papa Doc. Even the dead are not safe: their severed heads can still be induced to give up secrets.... Speaking about events aids the spread of domination over the country causing terror to seep through every crack and crevice. But people caught in such a situation do not fight the advertisements of terror but use them, proliferate them, and all the while keep the space of talking, passing information, and meeting together, alive. In other words, people in Haiti do not always passively submit to the disorientations of "epistemic murk" or freeze up with fear caused by violence and terror, but try to maneuver within these imposed conditions to achieve their own ends. (4-8)

In the era of globalism and globalization earmarked by the emergence of digital technology and new media the 'grapevine' as a site of rumours's active proliferation, is re-territorialised in the ethos of the shared digital field of experience in an age of transnational terror. One of the dominant rumours across the digital media in United States post 9/11 attacks is – "Within hours after the attacks on the World Trade Center, rumors began to circulate across the United States about Arab Americans "dancing in the streets," celebrating the destruction"(Fine and Ellis 30).

Rumours circulate in the post-global technological arena through and within the global grapevine, that virtualises the face-to-face community interactions in the form of graphical interactions of language. The dynamics of rumour formation and dissemination, through 'hashtags', blogs and revolution in the social media calls for an increased attention to the nature of this virtual performance. While the actual human forms recede behind digital codes and signals, the medium of internet and cyberspace itself paves a greater way for technologies of seeing, and brings a certain visibility to the process wherein hidden transcripts of rumour thrive to challenge the public transcript and domain of hegemonic power, as an organised protest that for a considerable time

formed and fostered communities in the performativity⁵ of ‘rumour’.

As a critical involvement in the arena of Performance Studies that analyses and critiques the notion of performance, a problematic that encompasses the field of Postcolonial Studies and other fields of research, lies in the process of naming, grouping and transferring ‘rumours’ as objects of analysis and epistemic categories. For ‘rumours’ are significantly not merely oral traditions but also performance as embodied knowledge, transmitted in the ‘globalectics’ of the here and there, that necessarily doesn’t partake of writing as a fulfilling universal domain of cultural transmission. To take a hint from ‘Wizard of the Crow’ as a performance strategy, the idiom of ‘subjectivity’ must be re-enfranchised in the multiple voices of cultural performance and of culture as performance. As Diana Taylor aptly puts it-

The repertoire, whether in terms of verbal or non-verbal expression, transmits live embodied actions. As such traditions are stored in the body, through various mnemonic methods, and transmitted “live” in the here and now to a live audience ... Part of what performance and performance studies allow us to do, then, is take seriously the repertoire of embodied practices as an important system of knowing and transmitting knowledge. (24-6)

To a suggestion of ethical ethnography resurrected from the inherent colonial violence from which it arose, the postcolonial cautionary attitude must stand guard, towards claims of theophanic realisation of ‘being one of them’. Jorge Luis Borges’s fiction “The Ethnographer” lends artistic expression to this issue. In the story the character of Fred Murdock makes his way to the prairie farms to research on existing Amerindian beliefs and knowledge formation, and days into his stay there as part of field work leads him to take notes secretly but later “...he tore the notes up — perhaps to avoid drawing suspicion upon himself, perhaps because he no longer needed them”(Borges 162). On his return to the city –

He made his way to his professor’s office and told him that he knew the secret, but had resolved not to reveal it. “Are you bound by your oath?” the professor asked. “That’s not the reason,” Murdock replied. “I learned something out there that I can’t express.” “The English language may not be able to communicate it,” the professor suggested. “That’s not it, sir. Now that I possess the secret, I could tell it in a hundred different and even contradictory ways. I don’t know how to tell you this, but the secret is beautiful, and science, our science, seems mere frivolity to me now. After a pause he added: “And anyway, the secret is not as important as the paths that led me to it. Each person has to walk those paths himself.” The professor spoke coldly: “I will inform the committee of your decision. Are you planning to live among the Indians?” “No,” Murdock answered. “I may not even go back to the prairie. What the men of

the prairie taught me is good anywhere and for any circumstances.” That was the essence of their conversation. Fred married, divorced, and is now one of the librarians at Yale.”(Borges 163)

Notes

1. Victor Turner, “Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbolology.” *Rice Institute Pamphlet - Rice University Studies*, 60, no. 3, Rice University, 1974. <http://hdl.handle.net/1911/63159>.
2. Ngugi wa Thiong’o, *Globalectics – Theory and the Politics of Knowing*, Columbia University Press, 2014. The idea of ‘globalectics’ was construed in this work by Ngugi wa Thiong’o as a mechanism of engagement and interconnectivity between literatures of the world as a way of negotiating literary identity in an era of globalism and globalization.
3. Luise White, *Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000. n.pag. <<http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft8r29p2ss/>>
4. The following idea is an explication of how the notion of power and the story it tells can be scripted by looking into the visual dimensions of architecture and the political narrative it entails. For details refer Deyan Sudjic, *The Edifice Complex: The architecture of power*.
5. The notion of performativity finds a considerable mention in Judith Butler’s works and she uses the radical potential of the iterable as a foregrounding point of her notion of gender performativity which talks of the performative in a much broader social context of performance. For details see Judith Butler’s *Bodies that Matter*.

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Gujarati Dalits' Migration and Diaspora Writings: A Study

M. B. Gaijan

Migration for safety, survival and prosperity is not a new thing for human civilization. It has been taking place since times immemorial. The history of human civilization indicates that it started from the early stage of human civilization and is still going on. But in the 21st century it has become a global phenomenon. Large scale regular commuting and migration, within the homeland and beyond, has been the reality in different parts of the world. In the present era of globalization, digitalization, rapid transportation and telecommunication revolution, geographical distance between two places is reduced. Citizen of any nation can now move to and settle legally in any part of the homeland or the hostland. And when one migrates, one brings one's cultures, pains and pleasures with one to the alien soil and as time passes, he makes the land of choice his homeland. These people - the migrated community within the nation and abroad - have started to tell their stories that have emerged as the voice of migrated or Diaspora.

The folk literature of Gujarati Dalits vividly shows how the Gujarati Dalits had to migrate unwillingly from their ghettos for survival. They were forced migration from the outskirts of their villages to unknown land in Gujarat or out of Gujarat. There is no historical record of Gujarati Dalits' migration. Folk literature is the only authentic guide in this regard. A study of the folk literature shows that untouchables were not allowed to enter the cities, towns and villages. They had to tie the cotton thread on their heads and deer-horns on their waists so they could be identified easily by the upper castes who did not want to be polluted by their touch. (Shrimali Dalapat: 93-118) Whenever natural calamities like earthquake, plague, cholera, and chickenpox had paralyzed Gujarat, untouchables were considered as the root cause for calamities. Dalits became the victims of (in)human sacrifice. Dalits had to run away to save themselves from this sort of conditions.

During the British era for manual scavenging untouchables were chosen. They were paid little amount. As a result Gujarati Dalits for the first time migrated from the outskirts of the villages to cities like Ahmedabad, Surat, Vadodara, Bhavnagar, Mumbai, Hyderabad and other places. Gujarat has the shocking history of riots. Whenever riots burst out Dalits became the victims. Collective boycott of the Dalits was also the reason for their migration. To survive they had to migrate. At the end of 19th century

and early 20th century large scale Dalit migration took place from villages to cities. In first half of the 20th century owing to the development of textile industries in Ahmedabad, Surat, Bhavnagar and Navasari large scale Gujarati Dalit migration to cities took place. To avail themselves of the work in small-scale industries Dalits also migrated to Rajkot, Jamnagar and other cities. Due to Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad's humanitarian education policy and actions Gujarati Dalits preferred Vadodara. Thus it is found that the first generation of migrated Gujarati Dalits was either scavengers or laborers and they lived in either filthy slums or ghettos with other low caste people. All of them were untouchables. After independence these migrated second generation Gujarati Dalits living in the cities got education. And after the mid 70s, they started to tell their saga. Most of Gujarati Dalit writers are migrated. Their writings present some unpleasant truths of the social reality of their lives. They were not accepted as the fellow citizens. Due to caste orthodoxy, they were treated with bitterness and abhorrence. They struggle to adjust to and be adopted by the mainstream society that has identified as untouchables and the segregated. They long for the dawn of a day when all Indians would be equal without any discrimination of caste, class or gender. They write in literary and non-literary forms to awaken and sensitize their Dalit brothers towards their rights, social realities and deprivations. They fight for their rights in democratic ways and their writings reflect that militant mood too. Migrated Gujarati Dalits' writings can be broadly divided into three categories which are as follows.

Migrated Gujarati Dalit Writers within Gujarat

The generation of Gujarati Dalits migrated from villages joined in scavenging or manual labour in industries in Ahmedabad and they were living in filthy ghettos near to the textile mills known as *Chali* in Gujarat. Since 1920, under Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's influence, they have started to write. Before independence, pamphlets and periodicals were published by Gujarati Dalits in Ahmedabad. *Navayuvak* was the one of those. Manor Gangera's poem *Antervedana* gives a touching description of the condition of the Dalits in first half of 20th century. They wrote with the avowed aim of awakening their brethren towards their rights.

The second generation Gujarati Dalits got education which empowered them and their writings became bolder. Harish Mangalam, Dalapat Chauhan, Madhukant Kalpit, Arvind Vegada, Dr. Pathik Paramar, Chandu Maheriya, B. Keshrshivam are the leading writers belonging to category of writers. Injustice and cruelty inflicted on the Dalits of Gujarat take place off and on and Mangalam in his poem "Dunghu Mely" bears witness to such an incident. The poem is about the Bhojapara Dalit killing incidents -

"Compassion for every living is the religious principle of Hindus (?) in spite of that Bhojpara becomes sacrificial place

And as usual the killing of Dalits became the game of *Kukadi-Mukadi*...

And the poor Himalaya since centuries stand still vertically... and at the feet of the Himalayas countless helpless Dalits were hanged on the stage of untouchability, reservation.

Though executioners are available here, but people say: in Gandhi's Gujarat there is no executioner!!!

Hey, Himalayas... Break your silence, trample under your feet...remove forever this caste-ism." (21-22)

Collective rejection of the Dalits remains the culture of the orthodox who unleash cruelties. Gujrati Dalit literature express a sense of solidarity with the victims and register anger and expose hypocrisy.

Chandu Maheriya in his poem "Since How Long?" writes about cruelty on Dalits and asks some anguished questions -

Since how long you will suffer?

Chains of these inhuman cruelties!

Started since *Rama Rajya*...that chains of cruelties still doesn't stop.....at the end of the 20th century.....

Mahadevapur, Ranamalpur and Jetalpur,

Pathhada, Parasbigha and Pipara-

This is not the list of places where Dalits' massacre took place,

But these are the modern *Tirthadhama* of independent India!!!!!!

How long you will bear these human hunters' dirty games?.....

How long you will keep Dalits in thus suffering!

For remedy, do something? (51)

The poet expresses his queer feelings aroused by the spectacle of injustice and indignities heaped upon the Dalit brothers. He also asks as to when Dalit issue will be addressed. Finally, he dreams of some changes and of doing something for the Dalits.

Most of migrated Gujarati Dalits remember their rural Dalit ghettos but never their villages where they were not treated humanely. It is because in their villages most of them have been insulted and had unpleasant experiences - a few also became the victims of injustice and cruelties. Arvind Vegada in his poem "Padar" (Outskirt of the Village) expresses his feelings thus -

As the village ends and begins dwellings, heaps of garbage and

torn and broken men...in school taught caste and then persons keep distance from me and his utterance go....go away....still pains me a lot.

With the cupped hands brought water that came before the mouth and hurled the worst abuse....water fallen down on the earth....Dwellings, heaps of garbage and the broken man is robbed in the schools..As the village ends and the outskirts and we...”.

(47)

Madhukant Kalpit in his poem “We” writes about the real condition of the Dalits-

That is We....without shelter and address, wherever we go hear you go, go away.....in this sort of insult and rejection we have to pass whole life! They have leisure time, under the cool shadow of trees, have delicious dishes to eat. And we fill up the hunger with insults and insufficiency. Doing this our hunger doesn't satisfy but it becomes more furious. (22)

The poet has presented truth about his Dalit brothers who are working in rural Gujarat as farm labourers and not getting enough wages.

To raise the voice against injustice and cruelties ‘naturally’ and ‘habitually’ inflicted on the Dalits, Shamat Parmar in his poem “Protest, the Natural Reaction” presents feelings -

They are pure vegetarians, on seeing the piece of meat their stomachs churn and nauseate....begin vomiting, sometimes become unrest because their food is simple! They are devotees!...

But when a Dalit is to set on fire or to kill a Dalit/ trample a Dalit or the son born by Dalit mother, to force him to have sex with his own mother, these people become butchers.....They become executioners/ beasts they become...they become merciless, they become men without human hearts.....Get up Dalits...react now . (59)

The poet has witnessed riots in Ahmedabad. Cruelties on Dalits he has seen, so he suggest his Dalit brothers for survival, protest.

Dr. Pathik Parmar in his story ‘Tejovadh’ presents the picture of contemporary social reality of rural Gujarat. It is a story of Tejo, a young Dalit school teacher appointed in remote area of Saurashtra region of Gujarat. He has written candidly on *Education Reform and* as a result he suffers a lot. The villagers of the village where

he is appointed as a teacher are very orthodox. They oppress and exploit Dalits by different means. In rural Gujarat a Dalit cannot get a rental house except in Dalit colony. In this story the writer has also presented salary scheme of newly appointed school teacher. It is a consolidated rupees 2500/- for five years. Recently the government has raised the salary but not giving the full salary. The story further presents a Dalit girl Champa's, the house owner's daughter, sexual exploitation by Mangalsinh, the upper caste at one evening when she has gone for her natural call at the pit outskirts of village. Tejo sees this event. Mangalsinh has left the girl and threatened Tejo by showing knife.

Migrated Gujarati Dalit novelists have given real pictures of Dalits' misery. Dalapat Chauhan's novel *Malak* is one such example. The novel presents love relationship of bonded Dalit labourer Bhaga and Hatha Chaudhari's young wife, Santok. Santok tries to attract Bhaga first and then relation develops. As a result of their affair, Santok gives birth to a male child. The born baby looks like Bhaga, and truth comes to light. So the angry upper castes try to punish all Dalits of the village. But the Dalits knew the fact. Mangalam Harish in his work *Gujarati Dalit Navalkatha: Uadabhav ane Vikas* observes what happened after that –

Dalits leave their village in night with whatever they could carry,
the painful migration in search of the land that can give them the
shelter. (8)

Dinu Bhadresarya's novel *Kidee e Khonkharo Khado* presents Godhar riots and Dalits' suffering. Harish Magalam's autobiographical novel *Aganzal* also presents Dalits' condition in rural north Gujarat. And B. Kesharshivam's novel *Shool* presents reality of Gujarat. The protagonist does not find a rented house in the city because he is a Dalit. The novel also presents cruelty on Dalits during Anti-Reservation Strikes. A Dalit girl was lifted when she was sleeping at night in Dalit colony and was raped. The accused were not arrested. At last, the girl committed suicide. The novel reads like a documentation. (Gaijan : 173-175)

Gujarati Dalits have started writing periodicals and journals - print and e-journal as well - to awaken, unite and inform their Dalit brothers about their rights and raise voices against injustice. *Dalit Adhikar*, *Dalit Shakti*, *Hayati*, *Dalit Chetana*, *Kanarashi*, *Dalit Vacha* and *Samaj Shrustee* are the leading journals worth mentioning. Dalit-centred news, information and essays are also published at regular intervals. Indeed, Dalit writers have written vociferously whenever cruelties and injustices have come to light. Thangadh, Una, Dolatpur incidents are cases in point.

Migrated Gujarati Dalit Writers in Mumbai

On 1st May 1960 Gujarat was separated from Maharashtra. But Gujarat Dalit,

during the British era, had migrated to Mumbai and settled there. They were mainly doing scavenging work. Under the influence of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, they had started to write in Gujarati. Later on Gujarati Dalit writings emerged from the Marathi Dalit Writing wing. Journals and periodicals are published. Aim of these writing is to unite, awaken and inform their brothers in Mumbai and in Gujarat. Haripar, Manilal Ranveriya, Lalit Pate, Bipil Gohil, Manilal Dhanoriya, Vasant Purani, Dr. Ratilal Rohit are the leading names in this field .

Haripar's stories are excellently literary as well as documentary in nature. He raises voice against violence committed on Dalit women. 'Somali', his story, highlights how the Dalit women are exploited and how to protect herself the Dalit woman kills the rapist. In the court she confesses the fact. His other story 'Boitara Indhan' also represents attempts of rape on Dalit woman, Mani who has gone in the farm of Gulab Desai to get secretly the firewood at the noon. Accidentally Gulab comes there, he tries to rape the married woman Mani, She cries for help. At that time Sukar, the labourer in the neighboring farm, rushes to help her. Gulab attacks him with Mani's scythe and kills him. He accused Mani for killing Sakur. But the writer has nicely presented how the public prosecutor performs his appropriate role. In the court, he proves Mani to be innocent and Gulab as the actual killer. The story sends message to Dalit brothers that sincere lawyers and court can help to get justice and criminals do not always go unchallenged. (21-28) Bipin Gohil, a poet, gives a real picture of the condition of Dalits in rural Gujarat. Dr. Ratilal Rohit is a critic, editor, scholar and poet presently working in Mumbai University. His poems are appealing. His interpretation of Dalit writing helps one feel the Dalit pulse. Gujarati Dalits have also migrated to Hyderabad, Bangalore and other cities but still their voices are yet to come.

Migrated Gujarati Dalit Writers Settling Abroad

Gujarati Dalit writers have also migrated to the U.S. A. and New Zealand. Pritam Lakalani, a U.S. A. based non-Dalit writes Gujarat Dalit centred poems and stories. He earnestly tries to make the Dalit voice audible . He pleads for justice and human acceptance. Sakur Sarvaiya also writes from the U.S.A. Kantilal Paramar after his retirement from government job in Gujarat, has preferred New Zealand for staying as his son works there. His novels *Geebi Timbo* and *Vajraprahar* present the Dalits social condition. *Vajraprahar* presents the misery of migration of a small village, Devasthali. It is a pathetic picture of helpless Dalits migration.

A conspicuously ennobling aspect of such Dalit writings as mentioned above is that the writers are more concerned with their fellow beings than with themselves. To a Dalit writer 'brotherhood' is more important than the tenor of individual sensibility. Here is a strong feeling of oneness with the fellow beings and a tension on the part of the writer over the question of acceptance by the academia. Even Dalit Diaspora

writers nurture the same apprehension - to be accepted as human beings first and then as a writers. Thus Gujarati Dalits' migration/Diaspora writing is quite different from mainstream Diaspora writings.

Note: All the texts cited in the paper remain originally in Gujarati language and they have been interpreted and translated by the author of this paper himself.

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Deconstruction of Myth as Feminist Strategy: Bhisham Sahni's *Madhavi*'

Guru Charan Behera

The paper seeks to present the deconstruction of myth a feminist strategy deployed by Bhisam Sahni in his play *Madhavi*, which is an interpretation of the episode of Madhavi in the *Mahabharata*. It is to reveal the power structure underpinning the myths and study the dismantling of the hierarchical structure. This is supported by the feminist pronouncement that woman is a cultural construct and the domination and subordination which is depicted as natural and universal is in fact cultural and political often legitimized by tradition.

Bhisham Sahni's play *Madhavi* is based on an episode in the *Udyog Parv* of the *Mahabharata*, in which Yayati is portrayed as a valiant generous king, Vishwamitra a learned sage, Galav his dutiful disciple and Madhavi Yayati's docile obedient daughter. After the completion of his education at gurukul Galav insists on paying *guru dakshina* - a customary obligatory gift a disciple gives to his teacher after his education is over. Vishwamitra, out of exasperation and, with a view to imparting final lesson to him about the dangers of willfulness, asks for the impossible - 800 *ashwamedhi* horses with black ears required for sacrifice at the *yagyas* organized for the purpose of attaining fame, virtue and redemption. In the whole of Aryavarta 600 such horses are to be found owned by three kings. Galav approaches king Yayati, who is on *vanaprastha* leading a hermit's life in the jungle to help him. Yayati gifts him his only daughter Madhavi, who has been blessed with twin boons - one of *chirakaumarya* the ability to regain her virginity any time she wants, and the other of giving birth to *chakravartis* the kings with sovereignty over many other kings. With Madhavi's consent Galav loans her out to all three kings, provides them each with a male heir and gets 200 *ashwamedhi* horses each from them. Still short of *gurudakshina* Galav offers Madhavi to his guru.

This episode in the *Mahabharata* ends happily for everyone. Yayati is shown as the most generous man, Galav fulfills his vow and qualifies as a great *rishi*, Vishwamitra is delighted both on account of his disciple and of himself for having fathered a male child, a future *chakravarti* king. As for Madhavi, she has proved to be an ideal daughter, unquestioning and obedient. In the *Mahabharata* Madhavi plays only a functional role. But Sahni brings her to the center, and reverses the gender hierarchy by giving Madhavi certain identity and agency, as she finally reclaims her body and uses it to defy the

male supremacist ideology inscribed in the female body.

Myths, in a simple sense, are stories or episodes from mythology believed by a community as embodiment of moral values, and they are attempts at apprehending the mystery of cosmic forces and man's relation to them. They are enacted through rituals that community members observe and take part in. Myths have been likened to dreams by Freud, and described as structures of primordial images by Jung representing collective or racial unconscious. For Northrop Fry they are the structures of recurrent archetypal patterns present in all cultures. These interpretations present myth as essentialist, unified, universal and apolitical. While modernism celebrates myths as embodiment of certain universal moral pattern, postmodernism questions their transcendental significance. Derrida deconstructs Claude Levi-Strauss' concept of nature and culture opposition in his interpretation of certain practices like incest prohibition, "The incest prohibition is universal; in this sense we could call it natural. But it is also prohibition, a system of norms and interdicts; in this sense one could call it cultural" (Lodge: 113). He denies the notion of the universal and myth as embodiment of the universal. Foucault's concept of power dictating discourse and Stephen Greenbelt's theorization of cultural practices and expressions as informed and inflected by the structure of power-relations present myth as representation of power relations of the time. The truth that myth attempts to express can be viewed as a product of power: "Truth is not outside power...truth is a thing of the world: it is produced by virtue of multiple forms of construct. And it induces regular effects of power" (1991:41). Myth as considered to be the embodiment of universal truth is informed by power relations, for the universal is a social construct. Robert Grave states that myths are justifications for an existing social system, it can be a politically coded message regarding certain distinct attributes or social make up of a people (1972). Hayden White calls it "a mode of discourse" and discourse is governed by power relations (*Myth and Memory*).

Myths, thus, are constructs and fabrications appropriated and used by the dominant class - the elite males as universal for perpetuation and furtherance of their power. They are imposed upon the other, the marginalized class, and here, the women tend to internalize the myths as universal, sacred and inviolable. Women are complicit in their subjugation. The subordinate position of woman in the society is produced by the patriarchal ideology that women are naturally biologically and intellectually inferior to men and myths are used to establish this ideology. Women's oppression is justified and achieved by a combination of physical violence and cultural pressure. Myth is used as a constituent of cultural pressure. The deconstruction of myth is a postmodernist programme of expressing "incredulity toward metanarrative" (1984) that challenges the high spiritual transcendental, non-political position of myths, and underscores myths as political and subverts the hierarchy of man and woman enshrined in myths.

Body Politics

This play deals with body politics - man's attempt to own, control and use woman's body and woman's resistances carried out from the vantage ground of body itself. The tangible ways in which patriarchy operates are experienced by women in the immediacy of controls and regulations on the body. The women's self in a sustained way is defined in terms of their bodies, and further reduced to their sexualized bodies. They are to be bound to the domestic space, are to be called upon to give the test of their virginity and chastity which have been encoded in mythology and practised in rituals. Caught in the web of social directives, women are forced to tailor themselves into appropriately feminized bodies, bodies as desired by men. Their subjectivities are regulated since they are constantly required to define themselves only through the 'male other'. Socially prized attributes of her body are required to suit what the males promote, and women internalize these male requirements and try to make them desirable. Women are trapped in, what Foucault calls in relation to the operation of power, "a short of immediate, collective and anonymous gaze" (1980:154).. The hierarchizing gaze is dependent on its transcendent character, for which it creates myths, its capacity to rise above and master the body, creating a complete severing of mind and body. Women are encouraged to become obsessive over the body, signs of mortality, so with the pursuit of beauty while men are viewed as persons, for whom body aesthetics are relatively unimportant. At the same time, women must be presented as individuals who are unable to control the body. There is a fixation on the female body for purposes of control. This cultural metanarratives are represented, preserved and enforced by certain myths.

Madhavi and Body Politics: Woman as Thing

Madhavi is shown in the play as a thing, an object. She is a special thing, a prized object, because she has been blessed with the gift of ability to renew her virginity, whenever she wishes, and with a fate to be the mother of *chakravarties*. What has been ascribed to this miraculous or magical power is the symbolic representation of the male desire or male fantasy to see woman as a sexualized desirable body and more importantly as a male bearing womb. This brings into focus another feudal patriarchal ideology which values male issues superior to female issues which is still prevalent now a days (the most obnoxious practice of female foeticide). Yayati exercises absolute authority over Madhavi's body and mind and does not care to ask for his daughter's opinion, he just informs her his irrevocable decision: "I have given you as a sacred sacrifice" (*Madhavi* p.10). She is thus objectified and used as a sacrificial horse in his *yagyan* for accumulating virtues and is equated with a sacrificial horse for male power. *Akashvani* the oracle that hails Yayati's generosity can be viewed as a male constructed myth to give it a divine sanction and legitimize the male power and privilege. As a means of subjugation the powerful very often invokes the

transcendental, like fatalism, the king as the incarnation of God depicted in mythology. So also the story teller, the narrator in the play, through his narration and comments on the greatness of Yayati, introduces the masculinist ideology. It may be the playwright's attempt to invite the reader to the debate. In spite of his being very close to the attainment of sainthood Galav has not been free from materialist desire and the patriarchal design to use woman. "Now that I possess Madhavi, even I can be a great king," he spurts out (12).

Woman as non-human

Traded for horses Madhavi becomes a barter-commodity equivalent to eight hundred horses: "But not to be married to one. I have been put on sale for an equal measure of horses" (14). She is used as a sacred sacrifice in the *yagya* of Galav for completion of his knowledge, and attainment of *siddhi*, supreme wisdom. She is used as a mere means for male power- Yayati wants to compete with Harishchandra and other generous kings, and Galav with all other disciples of Vishwamitra and Vishwamitra with other *rishis* for his supremacy. All these are not acts of renunciation but of arrogance and worldly pursuit of fame and reputation in the garb of generosity and sainthood. They seem to be indulging in power game, in competitive generosity and sainthood.

When Madhavi is taken to the king of Ayodhya she is examined in his court like a commodity or like an animal to be sold. "Even when one buys gold one tests its purity", says the king (19). The astrologer comments on the details of her body, as though she is a cow examined by traders in the cattle market- her back is straight, her cheekbones high, breasts fair, tongue and lips red, palms, the inside of her eyelids are red. Madhavi is asked to show different parts of her body for minute examination. This way of classification, generalization and categorization is a strategy of normalization, as Foucault has pointed out (*The Order of Things*). Signs on the body become markers of womanhood, and body becomes the site of contest.

Another dimension implicit in the play is human-non-human or man-animal hierarchy. While critiquing Enlightenment as anthropocentric, narcissistic, exclusionist denying the other Heidegger mentions that the other includes non-humans, animals (Qtd. Leela Gandhi). The practice of horse sacrifice in a *yagyan* performed by kings for their material and assumed spiritual interest is blatantly man-centered thriving through the elimination of the nonhuman. It is highly ironical that a holy person like Saint Vishwamitra would demand horses for his *Yagyan* endorsing animal killing. The myth of Vishwamitra, as depicted in the Mahabharat, reveals that he was a Kshatriya king before he attained sainthood through his *tapasya*, meditation in order to surpass Vasishta *rishi* in power and glory. His long meditation seems not to have effaced the vestige of that royal hubris. It brings out, too, the cultural conflict in the medieval period - the power conflict between Brahmin and Kshatriya. His demand for 600

horses is an attempt at measuring virtues in terms of number. This quantification of virtue negates the worth of the virtue.

Woman as womb

Madhavi is reduced to a womb. She has to live with Haryasch the king of Ayodhya, a buffoon, the king of kashi, a clownish weak man and the king of Bhojnagar, a decrepit old man, all of whom are far inferior to her in physical appearance, intelligence and dignity. She has to leave her sons behind, sacrificing her maternal sentiment. At last, she has to offer herself to Vishwamitra for the remaining two hundred horses. She is used as a precious womb. Sexuality becomes mechanical pre-determined, and pre-ordained by the powerful male desire or fantasy. Her vital erotic self is brutally trampled upon. She is doomed to be a womb that becomes her tomb. She is a mother from the beginning but with no maternal position, or recognition. Ironically, the eternal virginity ascribed to her is a patriarchal construct to keep the woman eternally subjugated but the same patriarchy sanctions the violation of her virginity by the kings she marries one after another. Virginity becomes a male construct.

Woman as Woman

In course of her ordeal of constantly playing a womb, turning it into a male child bearing machine Madhavi loses her self. She searches for her self, her love, her body which she can own, control and direct. She longs for her luminous passion of sexuality and for that, desires for Galav, whom she loves and who has also shown his love for her. She thinks he can transcend the patriarchal ideology to give her due dignity, help her restore and piece together her feminine self and her body that has been sold, divided, mutilated and dismembered.

The *swayambar* that Yayati arranges for Madhavi is another feudal patriarchal game, in which Madhavi is to be a prized object to be won by suitor-competitors, though she has already married four times. It is to be merely a show of his royal power and glory, not an expression of a genuine desire to give freedom to his daughter to choose her bridegroom, because she will have to choose one from among those invited by the king, not outside them. On the eve of the *swayambar* Madhavi appears before Galav, not as a beautiful virgin she could transform herself into, but as she really is at that time- a mother of four sons – a middle aged woman, sagging breasts, pale and wrinkled face with dark circles under her eyes. Her former husbands with her sons are coming to the *swayambar* as reminders of her advancing age. Galav is surprised to see her in that shape and pleads with her to use her power to renew her virginity, regain her beauty of youth. “I should go as I am”, (63) says Madhavi not to tow the male desire but to follow her own desire. She wants to reclaim and re-organise her body that has been possessed and mutilated by others. Galav changes his mind and is reluctant to marry her in such condition under the pretext: “But how can I marry

a woman who has lived with my guru at his ashram?" (66). When Galav talks of the difficult path of duty, she rebuffs:

You don't walk down the path yourself, but force others to do so. And the real irony is

that the world calls you an ascetic who seeks the truth and my father a generous soul
And me ! A capricious and emotional woman who can't be trusted. (66)

.....
I know that I was something for you to use, only an instrument (67).

She at last reveals her strategy: "I was only trying to look into your heart, Galav. Don't be hurt. Do you really believe that I would come to the man I love with all my being as an old woman?" (67). Hearing this, Galav instantly changes his mind and begs her to marry him. But she rejects him: "I can become young again but how can I piece together my broken heart?" (60) Madhavi takes a radical stance to reclaim her body, leaves the ashram with a sense of self-confidence: "I am sure that somewhere there will be room for me" (68). She can penetrate the male gaze and returns the gaze that sees woman's self separate from her body, does not recognize the self that pulsates the body. Her ability to renew her virginity is rather expression of her strong erotic imagination, manifestation of her body-mystic, the wonder of the body that people with stolid imagination cannot recognize.

Bhism Sahani is a writer of strong commitment and activism and was involved in the welfare of the marginalized section of society. Because of his deep involvement he can give an insider account of the sufferings of the marginalized. Out of the old myth of Madhavi Bhisham Sahni constructs a new myth to reposition and resituate woman in the present day society marked by gender discrimination. The *Mahabharat* as a text has evolved over the ages; it is multiple and heterogeneous. Even its author Vyas is unidentifiable, may be, a fiction. And, *Mdhavi* intertextually interrelated to the *Mahabharat* is a critique of the philosophy that views heart and soul separate from the body and supports the patriarchy that sustains itself through the supremacy soul over body and the domination of woman. It seeks to foreground the body and the marginalized woman seeking autonomy.

Note

Bhisam Sahani is a writer of fiction and drama with leftist radical orientation with concern for the marginalized. His novel *Tamasa* telling the misery and agony of common man in the senseless violence during the partition of India is a landmark work of fiction in India.

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Surpanakha: the Plight of Being a Woman from the Periphery

Soumya Sundar Mukherjee

The battle between Rama and Ravana in the epic *Ramayana* is often said to be ignited by a spark created by Ravana's sister Surpanakha who fell in love with Rama at first sight. The traditional way of looking at Surpanakha is one of vilifying her, making her totally responsible for the abduction of Sita, thus bringing the war to her brother's doorstep. Although it is true that Surpanakha plays her part as a catalyst in the great battle, it must not be forgotten that she was more sinned against than sinning. As a woman who, although a princess, roamed in the jungles, she is one of the more important characters in the epic who, in spite of belonging to the periphery of the civilization of both the Aryan and the Rakshasa societies, tries to bridge the gap between the two and fails miserably, and remains disfigured for the rest of her life as punishment. And we find that the voice of this marginalised woman is strangely silenced by the end of the epic, implying that she is not in the range of the myopic vision of the Aryan narrative that drives her away again to the periphery because she is both a Rakshasa and a woman. This two-fold aspect of Surpanakha's predicament is essential to understand her character.

U. P. Arora narrates the incident concerning Surpanakha that takes place in the 'Aranya Kanda' (the Forest Phase) of *Ramayana*:

During the exile of Rama in the great Southern forest near the source of Godavari, there came the sister of the Raksasa Ravana, named Surpanakha. She caught the sight of handsome Rama and fell in love with him. The ogress assumed the form of a beautiful maiden to attract Rama. She went to him, with a proposal of marriage, but was rebuffed by the hero, who sent her to Laksmana, his younger brother. When Laksmana too rejected her, the ogress revealed her cannibalistic nature and sprang towards Sita. At this Rama thrust her back and called Laksmana to disfigure the violent Raksasi and Laksmana cut off her nose and ears. (Arora, 122)

Surpanakha never knew the ways of the Aryan people of the city and she had no idea that the expression of her natural desire for a man could be interpreted as 'evil'

by the so-called upper-caste Kshatriyas. She goes to Rama to quench her desire, but Rama, an upholder of 'saddharma', not only rejects her but also toys with her emotions. And then Lakshmana disfigures her as a punishment. Devdutt Pattanaik sees this as the clash of two ways of living: the Aryan way of the cities and the forest ways of the Rakshasas. None properly understands the other and this leads to the strife between the two. Pattanaik writes:

Surpanakha is behaving as a creature of the forest would behave. She wants Ram and she expresses her desire freely, without embarrassment. But Ram is not of the forest. He clings to dharma and rejects the proposal. Surpanakha responds as forest creatures would, with force. Lakshman then reacts as a city dweller would – he strikes her with the intention of taming her. (Pattanaik, 64)

This 'taming' is done by the cutting of her nose, ears and nipples. Lakshmana had no right of doing such inhuman act to anyone, but he does so and the narrator of *Ramayana* interprets this as 'sparing her life'. *Kamba Ramayana* reports:

It was that bright sword which cut off her nose and nipples, but spared her life, that sowed the seed for the war.... (Kamba, 115)

The narrative dangerously implies that Surpanakha was shown mercy by being disfigured and not killed. Such is the predicament of the woman belonging to the periphery of the Aryan culture, the upholders of which neither value her frank behaviour (Rama thinks of her as a 'shameless woman') nor respect her very natural womanly desire for a beautiful male companion. Arjun Dangle writes:

The social, political, economic and religious restrictions laid down by the Brahmins in their religious texts were implemented by the kings or the Kshatriyas. Thus, to follow the duties allotted to a particular caste in the texts became not only a religious obligation but also obedience to a royal order. (Dangle, xx)

But the rules of the Aryans were not the rules of the marginalised Rakshasas. They never belonged to the "royal order", nor did they have obligation to conform to religious restrictions of the Aryan society of which Rama and Lakshmana were the products.

Valmiki's *Ramayana* already showed us that the Rakshasas never followed the 'dharma' of the Aryans, and that is why the Aryans never respected the forest dwellers whom they dubbed as monsters. The readers of *Ramayana* know that in 'Sundara Kanda' (the Beautiful Phase), Rama, the Aryan prince of Ayodhya, was spell-bound by looking at the grandeur of the golden Lanka of the Rakshasa king Ravana. So this is proof enough that although the Aryans always viewed the Rakshasas as monsters

or uncultured brutes, the Rakshasas were, in reality, nothing less than the Aryans. In fact, the four caste system demanded the Rakshasas to remain monsters or demons. The job of the Kshatriyas was to protect their people, particularly Brahmins doing yajnas, and the Rakshasas were always shown in *Ramayana* as the nuisance makers in the Vedic rituals. So the kings and the princes needed the demons to be killed so that their fame as the protectors of Brahmins may remain intact. The term 'Rakshasa' is pregnant with political implication; it stood for everything that was not 'Aryan' or 'Vedic', and it gave the Kshatriyas an 'Other' whom they can hunt down. Stephen T. Asma writes: "A person is demonized... by people who stand to benefit from the derogatory labelling. Monsters are "constructed" and serve as scapegoats for expedient political agendas." (Asma, 10-1)

In the *Kamba Ramayana* the episode of Surpanakha is described from the perspective of the torturers of Surpanakha. When she comes to Rama and prays for his company, Rama thinks of her as vile. She was indeed beautiful, but as it was not welcome in the Aryan culture for a woman to speak openly about her heart's desires, Rama thought of her as a bad woman. The description of her breasts implies that she was a lustful woman and Rama, the Aryan hero, should not give her the minimum respect she deserved. *Kamba Ramayana* records Rama's reaction:

As she spoke, her eyes stretched and contracted, scattering rays,
now bright, now dim. Her breasts rolled and heaved. 'A shameless
woman,' Rama thought, 'low-born with no good in her.' (Kamba,
112)

We cannot overlook the words used by Rama. 'Shameless woman', 'low-born', 'no good in her' are qualities an Aryan woman would never possess. Just because he thinks that Surpanakha is 'low-born', she is not supposed to have any good qualities. This attitude shows the arrogance of an upper caste Kshatriya prince towards a woman, who, too, belongs to a royal bloodline, but her not conforming to the parameters of a good upper caste woman leads Rama to think of her as 'shameless' and having 'no good in her.' This is the point of view of a patriarch who expects women to behave just as he wants. To quote Hawthorn: "Patriarchy marginalizes female experience and thus makes male experience the determining and dominating norm.... it serves to invalidate female experience and to consolidate patriarchal power through the social, cultural and political disenfranchisement of women..." (Hawthorn, 197)

As mentioned earlier, the plight of Surpanakha is two-fold: she is both a love-denied woman and a peripheral, low-caste character in the eye of Rama and Lakshmana, both males with the power to punish women and both high castes to scorn the marginalised. Rama decides that Surpanakha's love for him is evil in nature because it is against the prevailing caste system. "This sinful rakshasi knows no law

and has come with evil intent,' thought Rama and demurred, 'Fair lady, what you ask is against the traditions of caste.'" (Kamba, 112) The root of the caste system is so deep that it prevents the free exchange of love between people. Surpanakha knows how the high caste people abhor the lower castes or Rakshasas for not maintaining the 'saddharma' and she desperately tries to convince Rama by saying, "Though I am one of them, I hate their ways. I detest their deceit and violence. Having chosen good and rejected evil, I have done endless penance to expiate my past sins" (Kamba, 112). Surpanakha, for the sake of love, declares her own way of life as sinful, but it was not enough to win the heart of the Aryan prince. As Rama and Lakshmana are beings in the higher position of the social chain, they find it their moral duty to teach this wild Rakshasi a lesson and thus support the all-powerful casteism of the time. T. M. Yesudasan comments:

Caste becomes casteism when these social divisions are arranged in a hierarchical order and one's position in the hierarchy is used as justification for preferential treatment in inter-group relations. Those higher in the hierarchy grab the monopoly of purity, ownership and control over the means of production and political power. (Yesudasan, 151)

The two princes of Ayodhya felt themselves to be superior to the Rakshasi because they belonged to the upper caste. But the 'dharma' or caste system they followed were not in practice among the Rakshasas. In the matriarchal society of the Rakshasas, it was not a sin for a woman to express love for a man. Rama and Lakshmana were in the land owned by the Rakshasas, as we remember that Surpanakha would go to beg justice to her two brothers Khara and Dushana after being disfigured by Lakshmana. Here we see the Aryan princes not following the law of the land and doing harm to a member of the host tribe. In *Encyclopedia of Dalits in India: Women* Dr. Paswan and Dr. Jaideva inform:

As per Valmiki's Ramayana that land is owned by *Rakshasas*. ("Rakshasa Sevitam...") *Rakshasas* never followed *Aryadharmā*. They have their own Dharma. Ram tells Surpanakha that he came for fulfilling his Dharma. (*Dharmartha Dhayma Kamksheecha vanam vastu mihagatam*). This Dharma of Rama in most likelihood is the Chaturvarna Dharma which is not followed by *Rakshasas*. Ramayana i.e. Rama's journey was made with a purpose. The purpose is being to suppress the *Rakshasa*, i.e., followers of Matriarchy and to spread Aryan Dharma i.e. Patriarchy. (Paswan & Jaideva, 60-1)

In this connection, we are reminded of Sharankumar Limbale's claim that "Satyam,

shivam, sundaram is a foolish aesthetic concept” (Limbale, 22) The cruel treatment of Surpanakha by the two brothers denies her the basic human rights and they feel totally justified in cutting her body parts and not killing her, as if this was showing mercy for her misdeeds. If we take a look at the adjectives used by the narrator (most of which are placed in Rama’s mouth) to describe her character, we shall understand what the upper caste thinks of a Rakshasi. ‘Sly’, ‘shameless’, ‘low-born’, ‘sinful’, ‘mischievous’, ‘insensitive carnivore’, ‘lustful’ and ‘fiend’ are only a few examples. The epic deliberately vilifies the lower caste woman and that is why Limbale argues:

Satyam, shivam, sundaram – these are fabrications used to divide and exploit ordinary people. In fact, the aesthetic concept of ‘satyam, shivam, sundaram’ is the selfish mechanism of upper caste Hindu society. It is necessary to replace this conception of aesthetics with one that is material and social. (Limbale, 21)

Surpanakha is exploited not only because she is a member of the marginalised class in an Aryan society, but also because she is a woman. We have already seen some of the epithets used to describe her. Now let’s have a look at the ones used for Sita, the epitome of chastity in Hindu culture. ‘A gift from the gods,’ ‘a queen of heaven sprung from the earth’, ‘a flood of light issuing from the flower of chastity’, ‘vision divine’, ‘rare jewel’ are some of the phrases used to describe Sita. When we compare the two sets of adjectives used for the two woman belonging to two different castes, it becomes evident that Sita is the kind of woman Patriarchy puts up on an altar to be worshipped because she is everything that patriarchy demands from a woman: meek, reserved, chaste, silent about her desires and totally dependent upon her male companion. Surpanakha, on the other hand, becomes a threat to patriarchy because she freely announces her sexual passion: “Save me from Kama!” (Kamba, 112). Commenting on the nature of this patriarchal mentality, Lois Tyson writes:

...patriarchal ideology suggests that there are only two identities a woman can have. If she accepts her traditional gender role and obeys the patriarchal rules, she’s a “good girl”; if she doesn’t, she’s a “bad girl”. These two roles – also referred to as “Madonna” and “whore” or “angel” and “bitch” – view women only in terms of how they relate to the patriarchal order. Of course, how “good girls” and “bad girls” are specifically defined will alter somewhat according to the time and place in which they live. But it is patriarchy that will do the defining because both roles are projections of patriarchal male desire.... (Tyson, 89)

The character of Sita becomes a role model only because she always remains the ideal woman in patriarchy. She is the “acceptable version of feminine” (Barry,

122) and, unlike Surpanakha, poses no threat to the society. But Surpanakha perfectly fits the bill for what Tyson had called the “bad girl”.

...”bad girls” violate patriarchal sexual norms in some way: they’re sexually forward in appearance or behaviour, or they have multiple sexual partners. ... “Bad girls” are used and discarded because they don’t deserve better, and they probably don’t even expect better. They’re not good enough to bear a man’s name or his legitimate children. That role is appropriate only for a properly submissive “good girl”. The “good girl” is rewarded for her behaviour by being placed on a pedestal by patriarchal culture. To her are attributed all the virtues associated with patriarchal femininity and domesticity: she’s modest, unassuming, self-sacrificing, and nurturing. She has no needs of her own, for she is completely satisfied by serving her family. (Tyson, 90)

Surpanakha goes to Ravana after the forces of Khara and Dushana were completely destroyed by Rama singlehandedly. The slyness is there in her character, true, and she uses it for the purpose of taking revenge upon Rama. She even tells Ravana, a known womanizer, that she tried to abduct Sita for her brother, but the two princes had cut her nose and ears as a punishment for that, thus instigating Ravana to abduct Sita. This was her plot of revenge upon Rama and Lakshmana, although she had no idea what consequences her plotting would have.

The features of Surpanakha widely vary in different versions of *Ramayana*. Devdutt Pattanaik, in his retelling of the *Ramayana*, entitled *Sita*, comments on the varieties of appearance of the character and the effect she has on people’s mind:

In the Valmiki *Ramayana*, Surpanakha is foul and ugly and demonic. In the Kamban *Ramayana*, she is lovelorn and beautiful. Versions vary about how she looks. In Ram-leela plays of the Gangetic plains, she is comical in her vulgar display of erotic desire. The story makes explicit the conflict between natural desire and social values. It makes one wonder how one should see an erotically aroused woman, with disgust, with sympathy or with amusement. How would women see her – sympathetically or with suspicion? How would men see her – with outrage or embarrassment? The *Ramayana* repeatedly provokes such intense emotions and thought and thus draws out the humanity of those who hear the tale. (Pattanaik, 126)

It is quite strange that we meet Surpanakha only in the ‘Aranya Kanda’ of the epic. There is no mention of her in the post-Ravana-Badha period. The woman who

was one of the principal driving forces behind the great battle is completely silenced at the end. She disappears from the poetic attention, losing the spotlight to her more charismatic brother, Ravana. Surpanakha, a woman from the Rakshasa caste, is erased from the end of the epic. We never come to know what happened to her: whether she accepted Bibhisana's rule or left Lanka before that. The erasure of Surpanakha is a proof that she was not worthy of mentioning at the end, perhaps because she was a resident of the periphery and a woman, too.

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New Woman, Mesmerism and Subversion in Arthur Conan Doyle's 'The Parasite'

Shreya Chakravorty

Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930) was a self-professed Spiritualist. Following the death of his wife Louisa in 1906 and his son Kingsley just before the end of World War I, Conan Doyle sank into depression and found his much-awaited solace in Spiritualism. In *The History of Spiritualism* (1926), Conan Doyle even praised the psychic phenomena and spirit materialisations produced by Eusapia Palladino and Mina "Margery" Crandon¹. The novella 'The Parasite' written in 1894 dealing with the allegedly pseudo-scientific phenomenon of mesmerism can be best treated as an apt prelude to the author's Spiritualist phase.

In her essay "Spiritualism Ushering in Women Emancipation" Kathleen Meadows states that Spiritualism burst into the western world, spreading throughout western global society faster than any religion in his/her story. Not all feminists were Spiritualists, but all Spiritualists advocated women's rights, and women were equal to men within Spiritualist practice, polity, and ideology. By providing a form of spiritual inspiration in which truth revealed itself to individuals without recourse to external authority, Spiritualism became a magnet for social and political radicals throughout the nineteenth century³. As we see in *History of Women's Suffrage*, edited by Elizabeth Stanton and Susan Anthony, "The only religious sect in the world...that has recognized the equality of women is the Spiritualists."⁴ As such, an expectation of the author's sympathy for the cause of women is unconsciously built up in the reader's mind even before entering the text proper.

Moreover, the early 1890s was the heyday of the 'New Woman' novel. New Woman novelists like Olive Schreiner, Annie Sophie Cory, Sarah Grand, Mona Caird et al "authored" their own bodies by acknowledging women's sexual desires. Sarah Grand first used the term "New Woman" in her 1894 article "The New Aspect of the Woman Question," published in the *North American Review*, vol. 158, 1894. Through their works, these novelists advocated rational dressing for woman for increased mobility. They further challenged the expectation that all women must want to become mothers. Essentially, they tried to create a new identity for women through the construction of a new prototypical female body—one that projected power and freedom. It is this centrality of the body and quest for female authority that all New Women novels addressed.

Interestingly enough, through ‘The Parasite’, Doyle also questions the limits of female authority and autonomy of female sexual desires. Overturning the conventions of existing medical practice and literary representations of mesmerism, the woman as mesmerized subject is no longer shown in this story as a helpless object of the male operator’s sexual advances. As in Doyle’s 1886 short story ‘John Barrington Cowles’ the woman as mesmeric operator is herself a femme fatale – representing the New Woman’s claim to the full status of an autonomous subject. The novella thus plays on the two meanings of the word subject, one that was used in the discourse of Mesmerism to suggest the subjection of the mesmerized to the power of the mesmerist, and two, the sense in which the term was emerging in the feminist discourse of the time to refer to woman’s desire to emancipate herself from object status in relation to man.

The play on the term ‘parasite’ is equally subtle and significant. Parallel to the association of the term ‘parasite’ to the wily mesmerizer in traditional mesmeric discourses, there was a contemporary feminist suggestion in it. Whereas authors like Browning, Dickens and Poe, through the term ‘parasite’, pointed to the conductor of mesmerism who completely overpowered his subject to the extent of yielding fatal consequences for the latter, it meant quite another aspect in feminist discourse. Through this derogatory term, women writers pointed to women’s extreme dependency on men as idle and decorative housewives who had no independent income and therefore no self-respect, or to the over-sexed and hyperfeminine tendencies that women developed when they had “not been impressed with their duties to society’ ‘or with their own value as individuals.”² Emily Pfeiffer (1841–1890) in her sonnet ‘Peace to the Odalisque’ writes:

PEACE to the odalisque, the facile slave,
 Whose unrespective love rewards the brave,
 Or cherishes the coward; she who yields
 Her lord the fief of waste, uncultured fields
 To fester in non-using; she whose hour
 Is measured by her beauty’s transient flower;
 Who lives in man, as he in God, and dies
 His parasite...

This same class of idle and decorative women was what Olive Schreiner derogatively termed as the “sex parasite.” The novel read by Hewet in Virginia Woolf’s *The Voyage Out* concludes with the narrator hoping that “in the far future, when generations of men had struggled and failed, woman would be, indeed, what she now made a pretense of being – the friend and companion – not the enemy and parasite of

man.” (528)

In the novella, Miss Helen Penclosa is a parasite in both senses of the term. She is a female practitioner of Mesmerism. Though apparently independent, she is ultimately dependent on male companionship for sexual fulfillment and her hapless victim is none other than Austin Gilroy, a thirty-four year old ‘young’ professor of Physiology at a reputed university.

But before dealing with the issue in question, let us probe a little into the history of Mesmerism in England in order to understand Doyle’s deployment of this theme in particular. Mesmerism was embedded in the Victorian psyche to a great extent by the end of nineteenth century. In spite of looking askance at this phenomenon, Victorian public could not do away with their curiosity in this matter. Repeated references to Mesmerism in Victorian literary discourse substantiate this claim. Like his contemporaries, Doyle too was perhaps trying to cash upon the ready popularity of this theme.

Mesmerism came to England on the winds of the French Revolution, tainted with its European and particularly its French origin, often resented by a proud and suspicious island nation as a dubious foreign import. The scientific community with which Franz Anton Mesmer – the founder himself had been in communication, rejected it almost out of hand, as much out of indifference and general lethargy as out of disapproval and politics. Englishmen studied with Mesmer, and especially with his disciples, Bergasse, Deslon, Puysegur, Deleuze, and the Abbe Faria, who advanced Mesmer’s major theories and procedures with minor modifications to suit their needs. At the turn of the century a number of disciples, both French and English, attempting to make their fortunes and spread the doctrine, established mesmeric salons in Hammersmith and Bristol.

Some echoes of the marvelous doings of Mesmer and his followers had nevertheless from time to time reached the shores of these islands. So early as 1785 one Dr. Bell, member of the Philosophical Harmonic Society of Paris, and fellow correspondent of Court de Gebelin’s Museum, came to England and lectured throughout the country—at London, Dublin, Bristol, Cheltenham, Gloucester, Worcester, Wolverhampton, and elsewhere. He brought with him credentials signed by Despremenil, Bergasse, Puysegur, and other well-known practitioners in Paris. Even after the revival of interest on the Continent at the close of the Napoleonic wars, Animal Magnetism attracted little attention in England. We hear little more of it, indeed, until 1829. In that year the subject was brought forward by Richard Chenevix, F.R.S., a well-known chemist and mineralogist. Chenevix had been resident for many years in Paris, and had there learnt how to magnetise from the Abbe Faria. He began by treating the children of some Irish peasants who were brought to him to be cured of epilepsy and

other complaints. It is noteworthy that Chenevix held the view, prevalent amongst Mesmer's early followers, that the susceptibility to the influence was in itself a symptom of disease. In London he was given opportunities for practising in a military hospital, under the direction of Surgeon-Major Whympet of the Coldstreams. As a disciple of Faria he recognised that the physical sensations experienced by the patient were illusory—his article is headed “Mesmerism, Improperly Denominated Animal Magnetism.” He conceived that these sensations were produced by the will of the operator acting directly upon the nervous system of the patient. Dr. John Elliotson, who would gradually emerge as the chief proponent of mesmerism in England, came on two or three occasions to see the treatment. He tells us about his being much impressed on seeing Chenevix paralyse an arm or a leg, and give or take away pain in any limb, without saying anything to the patient, his intention being announced beforehand to Elliotson in French, a language of which the patient was ignorant.

Elliotson himself first became directly aware of the mesmeric claims and possibilities in 1829 when Chenevix, demonstrated the potential medical use of the phenomenon at St. Thomas's hospital and published a series of articles on the subject in the *London Medical and Physiological Journal* to which Elliotson added a brief “memoranda” (October, 1829). (*author's quotation in memoranda*) The medical profession immediately denounced Chenevix's claims and rejected his plea for dispassionate inquiry, attacking with what was to become its characteristic satiric animosity for the movement's accounts of its origin and history. Unfortunately, Chenevix died in the following year, and the subject fell again into oblivion.

In 1837 du Potet, who had assisted the second French Commission in their inquiry, came to London, and was admitted by Elliotson, at that time Senior Physician to University College Hospital, to practise upon some patients in the hospital. Later Elliotson undertook to practise Mesmerism himself, and soon succeeded in producing the somnambulant state. In the summer of 1837 Elliotson began to experiment with Mesmerism on ward patients; this culminated in public exhibitions held in May and June of 1838 in the theater of the hospital, attended by innumerable notables from the London medical, scientific and literary worlds, including Dickens. The ‘notorious’ O'Key sisters and others provided sensationalized demonstrations of Elliotson's commitment to exploring the power of animal magnetism. The controversy involved public scandal, allegations of sexual impropriety, bitter warfare within the faculty of the University and its board of trustees, the condemnation of mesmerism as quackery, and finally the pressures that motivated Elliotson to resign his professorship and leave forever the world of academic medicine for the public espousal of the “mighty curative powers” of animal magnetism.

In 1843 *The Zoist* became the official voice of the movement in England. The most significant of these books in characterizing the movement and capturing the

texture of the mesmeric mania are Jung-Stilling's *Theory of Pneumatology* (1834), James Campbell Colquhoun's *Isis Revelata* (1836), Dupotet's *An Introduction to the Study of Animal Magnetism* (1838), Elliotson's *Human Physiology* (1835-1840), James Braid's *Neurypnology* (1843), Harriet Martineau's *Letters on Mesmerism* (1845), and James Esdaile's *Mesmerism in India* (1847).

Long dead before the Victorians began their matter-and-mind, body-and-soul debates, Jung- Stilling appeared in England at the crucial beginning of the battles, emphasizing the independence and permanence of the soul in an imaginative manner. He represented the attempt to absorb the new science into Christian eschatology. The anti-materialistic and anti-mechanistic emphasis of Carlyle, Bulwer, Dickens, Tennyson, Browning et al., embraced the excitement of this societal ghost story, though perhaps of this distinguished group only Carlyle did not believe in either magnetism or spirits. But Jung-Stilling's English publisher and translator were right when they posited an audience for theories about both.

It was an audience that read with sanguine and scandalized avidity James Campbell Colquhoun's *Isis Revelata, An Inquiry Into the Origin, Progress, and Present State of Animal Magnetism* (1836). Colquhoun had the distinction of being denounced by both Christian eschatologists of the school of Jung-Stilling and scientific materialists such as Elliotson, Braid and Esdaile. Both schools objected to his amiable eclecticism; each found in him little or nothing of its own preoccupations. Colquhoun was a gentleman amateur who initiated a widely imitated type of book on mesmerism whose main purpose was to touch all bases – historical and phenomenological – in an attempt to demonstrate that the phenomenon was real and worth investigating.

Dupotet's *An Introduction to the Study of Animal Magnetism* (1838) emphasizes that "it is not to be forgotten that great mental energy, sustained concentration of the will, is necessary to control its influence." Dickens' good friend Chauncy Hare Townshend, in *Facts in Mesmerism* (1840), remarks that "Even the swimmer, who learns at length to surmount the boisterous surf, or to stem the adverse stream, will revel in the consciousness of awakened power"(33). A characteristic Victorian triad – energy, will, and power – emerges from the discussion, and is relentlessly accompanied in the larger context by problems of morality. It becomes widely recognized that these three concerns are potentially both destructive and constructive. In the very first year of "the mesmeric mania" in England, when Elliotson and Dupotet were under attack for their experiments at University College Hospital, Dupotet tried to make clear the fundamental moral and benevolent essence of the new force:

And if anyone should ask what is the moral tendency of the doctrine of animal magnetism, I should answer, that it obviously tends to establish the spiritual ascendancy of man over... material

conditions... and affords a precursory evidence of a future state of being, which belief in itself cannot fail to suggest those principles of self-government and moral conduct which alone can promote the real welfare and happiness of society. (341)

Great forces, great energies, had been released; and now, assured of their moral constructiveness, the Victorians desired to use this infusion of energy and this new power for the good of individuals and society. Among the different paths to progress within mesmerism the most controversial was that of the scientist. In addition to being damned by the transcendentalists for their particular species of foul materialism, the mesmeric scientists, mostly physicians, were equally condemned by their scientific peers for departing from their normal rules of evidence and verifiability. Colquhoun, who was accused by Elliotson of “nonsense, credulity and coarseness,” and Dupotet and Townshend were amateur anti-materialists, neither theologians nor scientists. But without the concern and commitment of John Elliotson it is doubtful that their movement would have received in England the serious attention given it by the educated and the public as a whole. Elliotson’s reputation as a scientist was solidly secure by 1837.

Elliotson, followed by James Esdaile and James Braid, represents the serious scientific approach to the phenomena: the attempt to categorize its various manifestations, to apply scientific standards of evidence and verifiability, to incorporate the results into larger diagnostic and prognostic theories (particularly in respect to diseases of the nervous system), to use the new force as a curative agent in the treatment of illnesses (which resulted in the foundation of the London Medical Infirmary in 1849), and to present to the medical world the claims of mesmerism as an effective anaesthesia in surgical operations.

Elliotson’s textbook *Human Physiology* (1835-1840), which went through more than five editions in a short period, had started as far back as 1815 as a translation of the esteemed German physician J.F. Blumenbach’s *Institutiones Physiologicae*. Blumenbach’s work had in later editions been reduced to footnotes, and, finally, Elliotson in 1835 produced a full medical textbook. Like many such Victorian endeavors, though scientific by the standards of the period, it was an encyclopedia of human teleology, ontology and physiology, all medical knowledge and history against the larger humanistic background. Between 1835 and the completion of the fifth edition of 1840 Elliotson added to his explanation and defense of phrenology and to his rather brief material on mesmerism a long assertive chapter on the truth of Mesmerism and its utility in medical science, particularly in the treatment of nervous disorders like epilepsy. Widely read by the serious public, the book had substantial impact in medical circles particularly. A generation of medical students could not avoid giving consideration to the subject. Few of Elliotson’s professional peers could escape the pressure to have some opinion on it.

But the official organs of the profession reacted with abrupt and definitive hostility, declaring that Elliotson's acceptance of mesmerism was an astounding aberration in the scientific discipline and procedures of a doctor previously notable for his scrupulosity. They saw utter absurdity in the claim of clairvoyance. But Elliotson had not accepted all aspects of the prevalent mesmeric mania. While there seemed some substance worth investigation in the phenomenon of sleep-walking and mesmeric trance, a scientist as materialistic and positivistic as Elliotson saw nothing but deception in many of the major mesmeric performances, such as those by the "primadonna of the magnetic stage."

While the mesmeric anti-materialists spared Elliotson the condemnation that would naturally result from the confrontation of opposing doctrines (they could ill afford to defame a general supporter of such prominence), Elliotson's scientific materialism seemed much too worldly for many of the mystic temperaments that had made mesmerism their enthusiasm. In criticizing Colquhoun's "inordinate love for the marvellous, whether true or false, instead of knowledge and judgment," Elliotson dramatized the division:

Materialism is as great a horror to him [Colquhoun] as phrenology; and he fancies that mesmerism proves the existence of soul independent of body, and is doing wonders by weaning people 'from the deadly errors of materialism and infidelity.' He is thus ignorant that materialists may not believe in God, but in the divine authority of Scripture, and more honour Scripture by looking implicitly in full faith to it alone, as God's authority, for their belief in a future state, than those who endeavor to make its declaration more probable by fancying a soul immortal in its own nature and independent of matter, when the Scripture tells us we shall rise as matter,— with bodies, and go to heaven with bodies, where Christ, God himself, sits bodily, — as matter, flesh, blood, and bones, in the word of the Church of England. (qtd. in Kaplan 23)

Elliotson's scientific materialism simply refused to admit of the existence of soul independent of body, a position that the Jung-Stilling camp abhorred. But Mesmerism could be the soul for many different bodies or the body for many different depictions of the soul. Like the good doctor he was, Elliotson preferred to remain with the facts of the body without rejecting the Christian tradition that the Victorians generally accepted as the larger context of reality.

The works of James Esdaile in India, which Elliotson published in *The Zoist* and then as a separate pamphlet under the title *Mesmerism in India*, exemplifies one of the approaches for which the scientific materialists had great hopes. Elliotson himself

had published in 1843 *Numerous Cases of surgical operations without pain in the mesmeric state with remarks upon the opposition of many members of the Royal medical and chirurgical society and others to the reception of the inestimable blessings of mesmerism*. Both physicians were astounded and horrified that the medical profession, particularly surgeons, among them Elliotson's former colleagues and bitter opponents at University College Hospital, refused to make use of the mesmeric trance as an anaesthetic in surgical operations.

Despite Elliotson's and Esdaile's claim that mesmerism was less disruptive to the physical system than chloroform, the introduction of ether in 1847 made the obstacles too great to overcome: even in Victorian medicine and philosophy an instant and consistent physical agent was to be preferred to a time-consuming and inconsistent psychological one. One final twist in the scientific approach to the mesmeric phenomenon was to suggest new directions for its utilization at a time when its defeat as a potential scientific-medical tool was becoming clearly apparent, despite the continuance of the public mania throughout the 1840's and 1850's. When James Braid in 1843 published his *Neurypnology or, The Rationale of Nervous Sleep, Considered in Relation with Animal Magnetism* he initiated a series of essays and books that eventually brought him to conclude in public that the mesmeric fluid did not exist. It was not an external force. There was no separate power or entity that had a physiological existence, visible or invisible. He claimed that the phenomenon produced by mesmerism or animal magnetism were the result of strong suggestibility between the mesmeric operator and the subject.

What the movement from Mesmer to Elliotson had vigorously denied, despite the differences of assumption and method from group to group within the movement, was now being presented as true, though the terminology had been altered. Critics of mesmerism for seventy years had declared that the phenomenon was not real in the material sense, that there did not exist some invisible but identifiable force outside of man but simply a mental or imaginative force not independent of the ordinary workings of the mind. Mesmerism was like poetry, an example of the inventive powers of the human imagination. All of the performances of subjects under the influence of mesmerism were the results of powerful imaginations working in congruence, not of an all-pervasive fluid or force that had a separate and permanent existence of its own. Braid, rejecting the language of metaphor for that of a newly developing science, invented the word "hypnosis" to describe what the mesmeric operator did to his subject. He insisted that "the manifestations were entirely attributable to the mechanical pressure operating on an excited state of the nervous system," that suggestion was the key process, and that "hypnosis" could play an important medical role as a curative agent.

The details of the conflicting claims were eagerly followed by a public avid for explanation and education. But despite the attraction of the intricacies of position

within the mesmeric movement, the press at large was naturally more interested in the titillation of sexual scandal, sensationalized accounts of various well-known personalities, and the claims of astounding, almost miraculous cures. The avalanche of claims, discussions, and accusations throughout the 1840's and 1850's created a public consciousness about the phenomenon that made the terminology and assumptions of Mesmerism part of the air the early Victorians breathed. This 'mesmeric mania' continued well into the end of the nineteenth century. It comes as small wonder when a popular author like Arthur Conan Doyle decides to dwell on this theme in his novelette.

Therefore, in 'The Parasite', Doyle makes his antagonist an avid practitioner of nefarious Mesmerism. Moreover, this antagonist is not the standard wily male mesmerizer on the prowl but a woman. But plot-twists do not end even here. Miss Penclosa is introduced into this story not only as an independent professional female mesmerist, but as the exotic west-Indian 'other'. Perhaps marginalized practices could be best justified and be suitably played upon if associated with people who did not belong to the core. An emphatic Prof. Wilson, friend to Prof. Gilroy, introduces the female mesmerizer thus: "My wife has known her for many years. They both come from Trinidad, you know. Miss Penclosa has only been in England a month or two, and knows no one outside the university circle..." We are instantly reminded of Antionette alias Bertha Mason in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* who is similarly portrayed as a Caribbean woman with a keen instinct and flair for imagination.

Gilroy's first impression of Ms. Helen Penclosa is however far from satisfactory. He says, "Any one less like my idea of a West Indian could not be imagined. She was a small, frail creature, well over forty, I should say, with a pale, peaky face, and hair of a very light shade of chestnut. Her presence was insignificant and her manner retiring. In any group of ten women she would have been the last whom one would have picked out." (n.pag)⁶ But even this scientifically oriented man cannot but praise the spark of brilliance and confidence in Miss Penclosa's eyes. Through her exceptional attire and her outlandish personality, Miss Penclosa readily instills a mixed reaction in Prof. Gilroy so characteristic of the reaction evoked by the archetypal New Woman. He comments, "Her eyes were perhaps her most remarkable, and also, I am compelled to say, her least pleasant, feature. They were gray in color—gray with a shade of green,—and their expression struck me as being decidedly furtive. I wonder if furtive is the word, or should I have said fierce? On second thoughts, feline would have expressed it better." (Doyle n.pag.) Thus, from the very outset, this lady defies definition and refuses to be contained within paradigmatic descriptions attributed to her sex.

The prefix "Miss" before her name makes her identity even more mysterious by setting it on the threshold of a potent indeterminacy. She might be a single lady who has always mesmerized men of her liking into subjugation. She might have found a

suitable context to establish herself in England where single women at that point in time could conceive of existing independently as professionals. Her prefix could also be a tell-tale indicator of her being a divorcee. That state would also find her in not the least favour in the-then Britain. At that period, radical feminists such as Mona Caird regarded the whole institution of marriage with such disfavor as to positively recommend its abolition. Some women jeered openly at the ideal of the maternal instinct and scorned the notion that the care of children was the highest duty to which they should aspire. The family, long regarded as a microcosm of the state, if not of the divine order, was exposed as a nest of seething frustrations, discontent and deception.⁷

It is only obvious that such a mystifying character will always be the unaccommodable 'other' to Austin Gilroy. His attitude towards her is one of steady bewilderment turning into sheer hatred once he finds himself helplessly ensnared in the mesmeric spell cast by this femme fatale. After she mesmerizes Prof. Gilroy's fiancée Agatha Marden successfully, Gilroy does not know how to repudiate this whole event as charlatanism. He can only exclaim: "I saw a smile pass over her face, as though an amusing thought had struck her. She stooped and whispered earnestly into her subject's ear. Agatha, who had been so deaf to me, nodded her head as she listened." (Doyle n.pag)

Agatha, "the sweetest girl in all of England", the almost innocent child-woman is the ideal of womanhood to Prof. Gilroy. It is interesting to note that she shows every prospect of maturing into the paradigmatic "angel of the house" after marriage. Her daily routine in her own words is music to any conservative man's ears. She offers the narrator the archetypal refuge, the safe harbor which any man in the Victorian age would have loved to find in his future wife. Every time Gilroy is at his wit's end, every time he becomes a helpless pawn in the grip of Miss Penclosa's mesmeric spell, every time he does profess love for Miss Penclosa in a state of mesmeric trance, he comes home to Agatha as the sole principle of reassurance in his otherwise unbearable existence. Once when Miss Penclosa forces Gilroy to slander Agatha during his mesmeric trance, Gilroy feels (even in that half-conscious state) that he is committing a mistake. His greatest fear is not that Miss Penclosa will reveal everything about their alleged relationship but that she will mesmerize Agatha. As such he ardently pleads to Agatha, "If you should happen to meet Miss Penclosa either in town or here, you must promise me never again to allow her to mesmerize you." (n.pag)

Agatha is concerned about Prof. Gilroy's gradually deteriorating health but is not wise enough to understand the actual reason behind his traumatized mental state. She takes this decline to be a direct result of Gilroy's increasing fascination with mesmeric experiments. On the other hand it is the desperate Miss Penclosa who must get the professor's amorous attention at any cost even if she has to extract it artificially by inducing in him a mesmeric trance.

When Miss Penclosa repeatedly humiliates Gilroy on being refused his love, Gilroy often finds himself on the verge of utter despair. His chair in the university is almost taken away on account of his incoherent mutterings amidst serious lectures. Still, he decides not to fall prey to the wily mesmerist's grasp. Next Miss Penclosa makes Gilroy attempt a bank robbery to slander his jeopardized reputation even farther. Even then Gilroy does not give in. But surely he understands the significance of being at loggerheads with a very unconventional and powerful free woman. Desperate for his love, Penclosa goes to the extent of warning Gilroy:

“Let us understand each other, Professor Gilroy,”... “I am not a very safe person to trifle with, as you should realize by now. It was you who asked me to enter into a series of experiments with you, it was you who won my affections, it was you who professed your love for me, it was you who brought me your own photograph with words of affection upon it, and, finally, it was you who on the very same evening thought fit to insult me most outrageously, addressing me as no man has ever dared to speak to me yet. Tell me that those words came from you in a moment of passion and I am prepared to forget and to forgive them. You did not mean what you said, Austin? You do not really hate me?” (n. pag)

This candid confession makes Gilroy weak. Even if for a moment, he feels a softening compassion for this monstrously powerful woman beseeching his love. Gilroy says, “I might have pitied this deformed woman – such a longing for love broke suddenly through the menace of her eyes.” (n. pag.) He could never deny the intensity and arduousness of Miss Penclosa's passion for him; only that he felt vulnerable and insecure about giving in to a relationship where he would be treated as an inferior “object”. On the other hand, meek Agatha placated his ego by silently supporting Gilroy's male subjectivity and helping him progress in his scientific pursuits.

Such a powerful, subversive and unaccommodable woman as Miss Penclosa has to be either contained or erased from the body of a text and Doyle decides to do the latter. In killing his female antagonist in a bid to free his nervous hero, Doyle is only replicating the societal response to both the New Woman and mesmeric phenomena. Gail Cunningham in *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel* says that the New Woman could not survive societal resistance for two reasons. Firstly, her conflict with social convention was not on a matter of principle. Secondly, her radical stance was taken on matters of personal choice. It was not based on any recognizable movement or organization. (Palgrave, 2014) Miss Penclosa not only lived life on her own terms, she had no battle of principles with society either. She was a powerful woman who fell prey to her own talent through over exercising it for narrow, personal, often vicious

ends. She was not a pioneer but a “Parasite” who wanted to creep into her victim’s frame as “ the hermit crab does into the whelk’s shell.”

The overt text of the novella thus portrays Doyle showing his reservation against the New Woman phenomenon and Mesmerism as any other standard conservative Victorian. Doyle is seen as making a mockery of feminist arguments for women’s autonomy to be achieved through economic independence and sexual emancipation. He is almost seen to be suggesting that a woman thus empowered is too dangerous to be permitted to prowl in a male-dominated society and has to be killed off. But it is possible to read between the lines and find the traces of a sympathetic portrayal that was missing in ‘John Barrington Cowles’⁸. It is Gilroy’s male ego and the threatened masculine subjectivity of the implied narrator that construe Miss Penclosa as a formidable woman. But between these two patriarchal perspectives, a third impression emerges – that of a hopelessly confused individual who mistakes power as the key to fulfillment in human relationships. Doyle seems to be suggesting that this is the common error of feminism and Mesmerism, and so feminism ends up duplicating the gendered power-structure of a mesmeric relationship, in which the operator is always in a masculine position in relation to the feminized subject, irrespective of the biological sex of either party.

Notes

1. See *The History of Spiritualism* by Arthur Conan Doyle published in two volumes by Cassell and Co. Ltd., London, New York, Toronto and Melbourne, and George H. Doran Co. (New York) in June 1926)
2. See Winnifred Harper Cooley in *The New Womanhood* (New York, 1904).
3. See Kathleen Meadows’s column at < www.unexplained-mysteries.com/column.php?id=259724>.
4. Edited by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Matilda Joslin Gage and Ida Husted Harper, published in six volumes from 1881 to 1922, Harvard University.
5. See Fred Caplan’s *Dickens and Mesmerism: the hidden springs of fiction*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975)
6. For ‘The Parasite’, page numbers cannot be given because the version used by the present author is an e-text, without page numbers. The weblink is given in the ‘Works Cited’ section.
7. .See the 1889 essay “Does Marriage Hinder a Woman’s Self-development?” by Mona Caird, <http://www.victoriansecrets.co.uk/>. It is also appended to her novel, *The Daughters of Danaus*, p. 535.
8. See Doyle’s short story ‘John Barrington Cowles at www.graphicclassics.com/pgs/Doyle_John%20Barrington%20Cowles.pdf

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Binodini Dasi in her *Amar Katha* and Other Writings¹: A Voice from the Periphery

Satyaranjan Das

In this paper I have attempted to examine how Binodini Dasi, the famous actress of the 19th century public theatre of Calcutta looks at her own position in theatre as well as her status as an individual woman in the society in her autobiography *Amar Katha* (*My Story*) and how therein we can realize that she has felt the agony for being marginalised in spite of her valuable contribution to the cultural enterprise of the nation. Her *Amar Abhinetri Jiban* (*My Life as an Actress*), an incomplete narrative on her actress life, *Basana* (*Desire*), a collection of lyrical poems, *Kanak o Nalini* (*Kanak and Nalini*), a long narrative poem, have not occupied much space in the discussion, as they are not as important as *Amar Katha* though they are relevant as expression of her anguished self.

Partha Chatterjee in his *The Nation and its Fragments* has observed that Binodini ‘violated every canon of the feminine smritikatha and wrote down what amounted to her indictment of respectable society...’ (154). In comparison to the New Women of India who wrote their memoirs bringing to light their strategy to fit in with the demands of their community, Binodini in *Amar Katha* is, indeed, a rebel. In contrast to her predecessors or contemporaries of the 19th century, she has not hesitated to refer to the unpalatable odyssey which she had to undergo in her personal life alongside her achievements in theatre. She has been ‘under no obligation to hide her deep-rooted skepticism about the verities of customary belief and convention’ (Chatterjee 154). Her autobiography does not concentrate on domestic life as do those of her contemporaries. And on occasions she is found to be severely critical of the society she has held responsible for her misfortunes whereas her enlightened predecessors, even if victimised by the customs of the society, could not imagine to do so from their pigeonhole assigned by their society which demanded womanly virtues like self-sacrifice, submission, devotion etc. I like to focus on the fact that ‘indictment’ is not all in her writing; agony of being stigmatized is writ large in the pages of the autobiography. Binodini’s writing her autobiography itself is against the convention of her society where only male writers or *bhadramahilas* went to write autobiography as is her writing the poems. Aspiring for recognition and respect she has rather gone with her training in ‘the language and sensibilities of the new middle class culture’ (Chatterjee 152), to trespass the domain where she is likely to have no access. The urge to unburden the pain and sorrow has also led her to write. But she must be anxious about the

possible reaction of the readers to the unpalatable portions in her autobiography likely to attract censure on moral grounds. In her apprehension Binodini has adopted a defensive stance and presented herself at the outset of the narrative as an outcast, deserving sympathy from none and possessing no power to express. She has wound up the narrative, presenting herself as an ill-omened thing utterly despicable. In her effort to express her self it has been natural for her to deal with not the domestic but the theatre life. Actually 'the class claiming to represent the nation' allotted her that space as she fulfilled their cultural needs (Chatterjee 153) and Binodini could exult only in that identity of hers. She has not been able to suppress her liaison with different paramours as it was an inextricable condition of the theatre of her times and she has all the time been conscious of her identity of a *kalankita* inscribed on her by the society as distinguished from that of a *bhadramahila*. In her helplessness against the authority of the society she has even ascribed her condition to *bhagya* – destiny. She has run after recognition and dignity in society but has been betrayed by all she has clung to. Her writings – *Amar Katha*, *Amar Abhinetri Jiban*, *Basana* and *Kanak o Nalini*, the last resort in her life dedicated to the pursuit of art, have also been subject to sheer neglect. But whatsoever little attention she may have succeeded to attract, she has thereby pointed out how she was left in the dark of obscurity and ignominy in spite of proving her exceptional worth. She has attempted to attract the attention of the nation which has excluded the actresses of the times like her 'from its fold'¹, though they too had some contribution to nationalist enterprises.

The déclassé² intellectuals imbued with the nationalist ideas in their aim to appropriate the Western naturalism in their hybrid theatre presenting indigenous elements on the proscenium stage introduced the women marked as the social outcast in the female roles as the central place of middle class women of the times was, as Partha Chatterjee points out, at 'home' (128). Chastity and skill in housework were very important feminine virtues whereas coming out before the male gaze in public sphere was not at all desirable. In many cases behind building a theatre there was some wealthy patron who was attached to one of the prostitute actresses. Binodini's use of the metaphor of 'living, speaking dolls' to refer to actresses like herself at the outset of *Amar Abhinetri Jiban* has succinctly brought out their status just as playthings in the hands of the middle class/upper middle class guardians of theatre. Binodini being exceptionally gifted was much indulged by the theatre people but in the Star Theatre episode her claim to respectability, independence and financial security was unscrupulously ignored. She absorbed much of what she learnt from her theatre training – the thoughts and ideas, feelings and imagination associated with western literature and education were ingrained in her as in the middle class *bhadralok* of the times but still it was not possible for her to erase the reality of her position of an outcast inside/outside the theatre.

Binodini's *Amar Katha (My Story)* is the record of a hapless girl's interesting journey from the position of an outcast - a girl of only eleven belonging to a peripheral section of the society to that of an established actress in her dedicated pursuit of her profession crowned with a roaring success, as well as a curious narrative offering glimpses of the progress of Bengali public theatre from infancy to its days of glory. The autobiography, at the same time, expresses an all-consuming agony of the woman having a *barbanita* background in experiencing deceit and deprivation throughout, though in parts it voices a peripheral woman's protest against the society. *Amar Katha* has ultimately turned into a narrative of the desperate but tragic quest of an outcast woman for social recognition which she has been denied. It recounts the bitter life experiences of the victimized class; bitterness is at the heart of the story. 'When Binodini refers to herself as a *janmadukhini* or one who is wretched from birth, she is not only describing her unique condition, but speaking for many women in her position' (Bhattacharya 12). Binodini is placed in such a position in the society as does not allow her to live a life of self-respect. Even after a spectacular achievement on stage she cannot live a life with her head held high; she has lived with the stigma of being a *barbanita* - a fallen woman. When we go through *Amar Katha* we hear her heart-rending cries interspersing the pleasant remembrance of her colourful days on the stage. Though the reminiscences of her actress life mostly exude a feeling of happiness, her awareness of her social identity is excruciating. At the time of writing *Amar Katha* Binodini has never been oblivious of her status of a fallen woman and hence used the words like *bhagyaheena* (unfortunate), *patita* (fallen woman), *kalankita* (tainted), *ghrinita* (despicable), *patita* (degraded), *samajbarjita* (outcast) or *barbanita* (prostitute) for nearly seventy times to indicate this. In many poems in her collection of poems, *Basana (Desire)* we find that she is conscious of her identity inscribed by the society: she calls herself *kalankini*, *kalankita*. In her actress life her competence has been utilized and she has, so to say, surpassed herself time to time to meet the challenges thrown to her histrionic talent. It is to be marked that her talents allured her mentor to project her into the male characters also like Chaitanya or Prahlad. It is an interesting paradox that Binodini Dasi coming from her outcast position swayed the large audience in the Star Theatre in the currents of devotion by playing her roles in the plays like *Chaitanyaleela*, *Prahlad Charitra*, *Nimai Sannyas*, *Buddhadevcharit etc.* dealing with the incarnations of Hindu God³, though the nationalist narratives had no space for the subalterns/outcasts in their imagination of the Hindu nation. In *My Life as an Actress* Binodini has referred to the fervour in her acting with other women like herself in the roles of Rajput *lalanas* (women) in *Sarojini* at Great National Theatre. The unfortunate women having no place in the imagination of the nation, evoked a sense of glory by constructing narratives of the Rajputs set against the *yavans* which was another outlet of Hindu nationalism of the 19th century.

Binodini's awareness of her status in the society never left her even when she was at the height of her fame. She has described that she 'felt just as lowly and despised by the world then' (MS 99) as she did at the time of writing her narrative. She was a 'beggar' at the time of acting and 'begged the kindness of the wise and the discerning' (MS 99-100). Her status as a lowly woman in the eyes of the socially respectable persons has been clear when she refers to the visit of Sisir Kumar Ghosh, the editor of the Amrita Bazar Patrika to the theatre to train her for playing the role of Chaitanya: 'He advised a lowly woman such as I on how best to bring alive and in the most subtle manner, the character of that divine being. He would tell me time and again that I should think of Chaitanya's lotus-feet. He was Patitpaban and His grace was boundless' (MS 92-93). Binodini's consciousness of her lowly background even at the peak of her acting career is to be marked: 'I listened to him [Sisir Kumar Ghosh] fearfully and I tried to keep my mind on the lotus feet of Mahaprabhu. My mind was tormented by doubts and I wondered how I was ever to find a way out of the abyss. I called out to Him at all times: O Patitpaban, Gaur Hari! Look kindly upon this lowly fallen woman!' (MS 93)

Though she was behind the establishment of the Star theatre⁴ and she was promised that the theatre would bear her name, the promise was broken on the ground that the theatre should not bear a *barbanita*'s name. The final stage in her life in the theatre has been a story of unequal contest between a talented but helpless and tactless young woman from a marginal section of the society, aspiring for dignity, independence and security and a group of her male shrewd and opportunistic colleagues coming of higher caste. Fame brought a desire for importance but the theatre community was not ready to accept her claim and efforts were always there to retain her in a marginalized position in their community. In her struggle she felt wearied and had to leave what was her all absorbing passion. The episodes of betrayal in naming the Star Theatre or Binodini's departure from the stage in *Amar Katha* are rather too brief. Her grievance against the theatre family of which she thought herself a part and for which she made a great self-sacrifice has been gagged. In two issues of *Natya-mandir*, a monthly periodical, portion of the narrative (up to National Theatre chapter), which came out later in the book form, had been published but just then it was discontinued. Perhaps there was some conspiracy to prevent the unsavoury story of her betrayal by the colleagues in Star Theatre from coming to light in the next issue. There was also a probability that the actress felt embarrassed to blatantly expose the treachery of her colleagues who then earned much name and fame. Binodini sought an introduction from her mentor Girishchandra revealing the facts but he evaded the bitter truth. On his favourite student's persuasion he promised to rewrite his introduction but he left the world with his task unaccomplished. The same thing happened when she was once more assigned the task of writing her actress life in *Rup-o-Rang*, a weekly

periodical, and this time also she was abruptly stopped after eleven instalments of her narrative had come out. In the chapter on Star Theatre or the other parts of *Amar Katha* Binodini has never forgotten her sense of decorum while referring to her colleagues even though she has been betrayed by them. She has not been able to shake off the sensibility of a *bhadramahila* ingrained in her through the training in theatre. What she has told us is certainly important but there are many things which have remained untold.

In different popular *jatra* or *natak* versions of her life she has been represented as redeemed by the blessings of Ramakrishna Paramahansa. In most of them there is a soothing suggestion of the last phase in Binodini's life acquiring a *bhadramahila* status, though in reality Binodini could earn only the status of a co-wife of some aristocratic person having the lineage of some royal family of Calcutta and we find her in utter loneliness and despair just after she had lost her *h?idaydevata*: 'I have no kith, no kin, no religion, no work, no rationale... (MS 107)'. She has spoken of heartless neglect of the people in that stage of her life. Partha Chatterjee has pointed out that the 'individual patronage, no matter how sincere, could hardly overcome the boundaries of a newly constructed world of the dominant that could only claim to speak on her behalf but never recognize her as its constituent part' (154).

In the chapter on the Star Theatre she has implied the responsibility of the society for their condition, by a mild interrogative. Only once in the portion marked as Last Border she has been furious to question the role of the society in pushing her class to its plight, for which it, in her view, has the least responsibility: 'They become prostitutes forced by circumstances, lacking shelter, lacking a space' (MS 105). Binodini points out that they, too, could live the life of 'respectable' women if their circumstances had not played tricks with them: '... they, too, first come into this world with the heart of a woman. The woman who is a loving mother, she too belongs to the self-same species! The woman who dies in the burning flames with her husband also belongs to that same species (MS 105)!' Binodini pines for being denied the space of the *bhadramahila* of her society who have found meaning in fitting in the roles assigned to them by convention. But she considers herself as distinguished from the ignorant women who lead their life like inanimate matter and are engulfed in darkness. Her accomplishment has endowed her with aspirations and this has tormented her. She raises her voice from periphery: 'A prostitute's life is certainly tainted and despicable; but where does the pollution come from? Surely they were not despicable from the time that they were in the mother's womb?' (MS 105) She holds up the cause of the women 'who are taken in by the artfulness of men and trusting in them are doomed to carry an everlasting stigma and bear the pain of unending hell'. The victimized woman exposes the hypocrisy of the men who display hatred for the prostitutes in the public and at the same time 'secretly, away from the eyes of men, pretend that they are the best of

lovers' and take the hapless women 'to the brink of complete surrender thus causing the ruin of trustful and helpless women ... [and] abandon those women' (MS 105). Binodini tries to raise a voice of protest, however feeble it may be, against the 'leaders of society' who were 'respected and adored in society' (MS 105). The irony of the situation has been pointed out by her when she comments that these 'tempters of the helpless' from the dominating position in the society 'pass moral judgement on these insecure women in order to crush them at every step of their existence' (MS 105-106). She sarcastically observes that the moral guardians of the society take utmost care to drive away the innocent children of the hapless fallen women from schools⁵ or any other place if they are sent there for education in expectation that they stay on the right track in their life. Binodini is scathing about the double standard of the society where 'Nothing is lost for a man even if a hundred mistakes are made but 'a woman is doomed if her step but falter one bit'' (MS 106).

Binodini's writings have been ignored by the historians of Bengali literature. Soumitra Chattopadhyay and Nirmalya Acharya have categorically pointed out the fact in their preface to *Amar Katha o Anyanya Rachana*. They have noted how sincerity, simplicity and thoughtfulness have gone into the making of *Amar Katha*. Sensitivity, power of observation and lucid style of description characterize both *Amar Katha* and *Amar Abhinetri Jiban* though a deep sense of pain about life has lent profundity to the earlier of the two. Girishchandra has spoken of the 'poetry' of the autobiography of his talented disciple, though it has been a fault to him as, in his opinion, the narrative could have been instructive in practically delineating the process of her learning or perseverance from the actress's experience. But to us *Amar Katha* has been a social document having a remarkable literary value. Chattopadhyay and Acharya have also pointed out the distinction of the prose style. As regards her achievement in poetry, in their opinion, she could be ranked equally with any of the poetess of the times. But the autobiography of the thespian is much important as it drives home the incompatibility between her humiliation of social identity and happy confidence in actress personality. Binodini could occupy her place in theatre as there was no *bhadramahila* to do it. But in the sphere of social respectability she was marked out as a trespasser by the way 'both spaces and bodies are imagined (politically, historically and conceptually) ...' (Kumar 105). Though full of poetry are the portions where Binodini describes her entrance into the dream world of acting – into the world of economic ease, success and fame from the world of poverty, ordinariness and anonymity or her absorption in the world of acting, the autobiography has been a social document by the expression of her sense of humiliation and marginalization in the larger social sphere which she feels especially when she is aspiring to address her prospective readers there. If we go through *Amar Abhinetri Jiban* we do not find the consciousness of the socially stigmatized identity of Binodini writ large. The narrative

recounts her experience as an actress as distinguished from her bitter consciousness of her marginalized position in the society. Though incomplete, it is pleasant with her memory of the journey of her actress self clear of the disturbing awareness of the shadow of her personal identity of a lowly woman. This autobiographical writing is important in that it presents Binodini dragged to a 'dream world of another age' which could never be severed from her consciousness. Even though she aspired for a socially respectable identity in the shelter of Saratchandra Sinha at Paikpara⁶, leaving theatre for some three decades in the prime of her life, she has perhaps ultimately realized that her true identity lies in her theatre life. The star actress lays aside the ignominy of her social marginalization at the fag end of her life, basking in the glory of her contribution to the making of Bengali theatre. The fact of transmutation from 'mud lying in the bottom of the ponds' (*My Life* 129) into speaking dolls and then into artists 'oblivious of [their] ... selves' (*My Life* 152) is foregrounded. What attracts our attention is the identification of Binodini with the world of her passion and the whole writing is characterized by a placidity of temperament which she has achieved 'after the furious travels of a lifetime, when it is... time to take leave of this guest house known as the world' (*My Life* 129). Even the portion of *Amar Katha* published in two issues of *Natya-mandir* two years before its publication as a book is free of the embarrassing consciousness of her social identity except in one place. These writings were obviously addressed towards the theatre enthusiasts among whom, she thought, she had still a place of honour and so she had not to be apologetic or embarrassed. In neglectful attitude of the scholars or historians towards the autobiography her marginalized position has been clear. Binodini is all the time during writing her life conscious of the peril of trespassing into the domain of *bhadramahila* or the male writers. She is quite defensive when she puts it: 'Utterly despicable and degraded is our status in society, but let them not read it who will despise or ridicule this insignificant bit of writing' (*MS* 104). She tries to elicit sympathy from the readers: 'Those who in their kindness show some sympathy because the writer is a sad and unfortunate woman will understand the intense pain in this heart' (*MS* 104). The autobiography is remarkable for the writer's frankness and courage if we keep in our mind the time when she wrote it. It is difficult today to form an idea about what position Binodini was writing from. Even Girishchandra Ghosh who was a father figure to Binodini with his affectionate indulgence towards her, the most talented of his students, has been anxious to mention the connection between Binodini and the redeeming visit of Ramakrishna to the theatre at the very outset of his essay 'Banga-rangalaye Srimati Binodini' ('Srimati Binodini and the Bengali Stage'). However, he has considered the visit as redeeming the whole of the theatre world which had a very ambiguous position in the cultural life of Bengal. He has been doubtful about whether the autobiography would be held in high regard, finding the position of the Bengali stage in not so favourable a situation (218). We find that he has been very much conscious especially of the status of Binodini in the society because

he initially attempted to dissuade her as, in his opinion, there was no point in her revealing the anguish of her heart as there was none to sympathise with her⁷. He is very much cautious and defensive in his stance when he makes excuses for writing the foreword for the book of a fallen woman. He has here again alluded to the visit of the *patitapaban* Paramahansa to redeem the *patita*. (It is again during the discussion of Binodini's acting in *Chaitanyalila* that Ghosh has focussed on her redemption as a result of the blessings she got from Ramakrishna.) He has given his excuse that there is the prospect that the sinners will be assured by the life of Binodini redeemed by the *dayamay* (kindhearted). In Girishchandra's view, 'inspired by her desire to write about her innermost feelings' (212), Binodini has sought sympathy from the readers. He is uneasy about her bitter criticism of the society as the readers may lose their sympathy for her because of this harshness.

The poems by Binodini should be judged keeping in view the standard of poems by the poetesses of her times, even many of the lesser poets. Many poems in *Basana* (*Desire*) as her *Amar Katha* (*My Story*) has made an attempt to unburden Binodini's pains and agony of her *kalankita* identity. Many others point to the pulls of desire and express pangs of unfulfillment and loneliness which could be expression of a young woman from the respectable society. In a lengthy poem in *Basana* a young woman's frustration in love has formed the content. In *Kanak o Nalini* we find a fantasy of Binodini in the marriage of an orphan girl with an orphan boy in their youth after their happy days under the affectionate care of a *muni* in his *ashram* in the forest, though ultimately their connection with the *lokalay* has been established as the young man has got a job under a zamindar. Themes of Love, marriage and fulfillment in life have been predominant in the poetess's mind. The irony of the situation comes out when we consider the fact of the poetess's deprivation in personal life. There are references to *sarbasaktiman*, *Patitapaban* in *Amar Katha*; several poems in *Basana*, and *Kanak o Nalini* (*Kanak and Nalini*) bring out the writer's consciousness of *bibhamay jyotirmay*, *chidananda chaitanyaswarup*. There is the quotation of Sanskrit *sloka* on the mutability of everything on earth in the portion: 'What is the gift?' preceding the main narrative of *Amar Katha* and the realization of illusory nature of *maya bandhan* in the books of poems. Spiritual leanings can be traced in the deep-rooted longing for social acceptance in the heart of a woman in a peculiar situation whose feet had been touched by many from the audience when she played Chaitanya (Ghosh 217) and who, as judged on the basis of her lineage, has been cast out by the society.

Notes

1. The Bengali originals of *Amar Katha*, *Amar Abhinetri Jiban*, *Basana* and *Kanak o Nalini* by Binodini Dasi have been published in *Amar Katha o Anyanya Rachana* edited by Soumitra Chattopadhyay and Nirmalya Acharya (See Works Cited). The English versions are available for *Amar Katha* and *Amar Abhinetri Jiban* in *My Story* and *My*

Life as an Actress edited by Rimli Bhattacharya (See Works cited).

2. See Partha Chatterjee's *The Nation and its Fragments* p.154
3. See *My Story and My Life as an Actress* (edited by Rimli Bhattacharya), p. 10. Sudipto Chatterjee also speaks of the theatre practitioners coming of *bhadralok* section of the Bengali society had an ambivalent position in the society of the times as 'they were contaminated men- licentious, alcoholic, bohemian' (See *The Colonial Staged*, p. 208) and still had connections in society of the *bhadralok*. Rimli Bhattacharya has written about Amritalal Basu's 'access to the homes of most upper class people' (p. 206). Girishchandra Ghosh also had access to Babu houses (See *The Colonial Staged* p. 166). They shared the new middle class values and ideals as they absorbed the nationalistic ideas and represented them in their theatre.
4. Girishchandra Ghosh has presented Chaitanyadev and Buddhadev as incarnations of God in his plays. See *Bangla Nataka Itihas* p. 156-157.
5. Gurmukh Rai madly infatuated with Binodini invested all the money required for the establishment of the theatre after Binodini had declined his offer of Rs. fifty thousand to be only his paramour, leaving the theatre.
6. The translation by Rimli Bhattacharya in *My Story and My Life as an Actress* is not in conformity with the Bengali original.
7. See *My Story and My Life as an Actress* (edited by Rimli Bhattacharya), p. 228.
8. The translation by Rimli Bhattacharya is not in conformity with the Bengali original.

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Doubly Marginalized: A Study of the Representation of Dalit Woman in Sunil Kumar Das's "Dhani Bauri Gets 'Salvation'"

Asit Panda

The condition of the native woman in the postcolonial state has received the serious critical gaze of many literary theorists including Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and others in recent decades. To theorize her perception of the condition of the native within colonialism and the woman in postcolonial state as belonging to the oppressed class, Spivak adapts the notion of the subaltern from Antonio Gramsci in her famous article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Within the structure of Colonialism, Spivak finds the native woman as the victim of both patriarchy and colonialism which reduce them to silence. Gesturing at the extremely oppressive and restricted contexts of women's lives, trapped by/within both patriarchy and colonialism, in an early work like *A Double Colonisation: Colonial and Post-colonial Women's Writing* (1986) Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford also talked about the 'double colonization' of women in colonialism. The condition of the native women under colonialist structure has close correspondence with that of the Dalit women in India under the process of continuous persecution by both oppressive traditional 'Varna' system of larger Hindu society as well as the patriarchal social order of their own Dalit society. Like the male members of their own community, they are exploited and marginalised in Hindu society but in their case, this marginalisation is double. Dalit women in India are not only victims of social and cultural alienation due to their caste or class identity, but also sufferers from gender-based inequality and oppression, which they regularly encounter in family, community and society. As Beena Agarwal points out, the women of Dalit society are "dalit of dalits' because their humanity is crushed under the burden of patriarchy as well as under the burden of caste prejudice." However, as Agarwal continues, "even within their double marginalization," they "retain the glory of womanhood and preserve the sublimity of the spirit to redefine their inner reservoir of spirit to assert their identity" (167).

Closely associated with the Bengali Dalit Sahitya Sanstha and Dalit literary movement in Bengal, Sunil Kumar Das is a familiar name in the field of Bengali dalit literature and has a good number of published books of short stories on the lives of lower class people (Bauris) to his credit. A component of the anthology entitled *Gram Ganjer Galpo* (Stories of the Countryside), Sunil Kumar Das's short story "Dhani Bauri Ganga Pelo" has been translated into English by Indranil Acharya from the original

Bengali as “Dhani Bauri Gets ‘Salvation’”. The objective of this paper is to explore the representation of the female protagonist in Das’s aforementioned Dalit narrative. This paper not only focuses on the victimisation and exploitation of the Dalit women in the hands of both caste-ridden Hindu society and patriarchal social order but also seeks to probe into the Dalit consciousness embodied in the narrative as well as the writer’s Dalit point of view.

Das’s narrative initiates with the introduction of the first person point of view. The narrator (Nilu) who is a factory-worker introduces his colleague Subodhda who offers the author a scope for presenting the third person point of view. The tragic tale surrounding the eventful life of Dhani Bauri, a Dalit woman belonging to the lowest social strata of Bengali Hindu society gets unfolded during the interaction between the narrator and Subodhda. Again Subodhda, apart from his own narration, resorts to depiction of Dhani Bauri’s interaction with other characters for portrayal of Dhani Bauri’s life and character. Through the perspectives offered by the narrator and Subodhda who pass commentaries on various events of Dhani Bauri’s life, the readers also get familiar with the author’s perspectives on pertinent social issues, which are different from other characters’ points of view.

As presented in the story, Dhani Bauri, a young Dalit woman, having been deserted by her husband over trivial issues, lived in Sekhpur village and earned her living by working in Bejdih colliery. Gopal Maji, another resident of the same village who earned money by carrying various kinds of goods from the workshop to the nearby colliery in his bullock cart, was a close acquaintance of Dhani Bauri. As he could not meet the needs of his large family with the small plot of agricultural land he had and inadequate amount of cart rent he received from the colliery, Gopal Maji used to exploit Dhani Bauri’s generosity to be financially aided by her. In terms of its portrayal of the authentic experience of a Dalit woman of exploitation and humiliation, Das’s story occupies a unique position among Dalit narratives. The exploitation of Dhani Bauri, the female protagonist who suffers both as a Dalit and a woman in Das’s story, occurs not only due to the operation of the hegemonic caste hierarchy of Hindu society in which upper class people like Ghoshal Babu treat lowborn women like Dhani Bauri as easily available sexual objects but through the machinations of the male members of her own community like Gopal Maji in the patriarchal social order who treats her as means of earning but denies her the due honor and liberty of taking financial decisions. However, what is highlighted in Das’s narrative is not Dhani Bauri’s passive acceptance of physical humiliation by the upperclass Hindus but her defiant rebellious spirit in the face of such indignity. Confronted with the indecent behaviour of Ghoshal Babu, the record-keeper of the colliery who “uttered obscene words to entice” her, Dhani Bauri “held Ghoshal babu by the collar of his shirt and started beating him up with her slippers” (Das 148). It is her Dalit consciousness which turns her rebellious against

the structure of a society which refuses the Dalits honour, social justice and equality. It is this Dalit consciousness which helps her realize the reason of her humiliation and servitude. Dhani Bauri becomes a true representative of all the Dalit women who are getting exploited and persecuted every now and then in the caste-ridden Hindu society because of their low position on the social ladder as she voices their collective anguish and fury: “These upper caste people treat us as commodities. When we resist their immoral advances they blacken us by questioning our character. I’ll kill such hypocrites” (Das 148).

Thus, Dhani Bauri, a poor Dalit woman asserts her identity as a challenger of both male oppression and caste oppression in her society. She demonstrated the identical integrity when, despite the implorations of her relatives and unlike many other women of the period, she did not go for a second marriage after her husband had deserted her. Her devotion to her husband implanted in her mind a belief in her husband’s return: “I thought my husband will take me back to his home. Later, I heard that he had done a *sanga* at Palashdiha village. Still I was under the impression that he’d definitely turn up some day. He didn’t. I was a fool” (Das 148). In her personal family life, thus, Dhani Bauri was also a victim of male oppression. Yet it is not her defeat or silent acceptance of suffering but her basking in the glory of womanhood and triumphant spirit which have been foregrounded in Das’s character delineation.

In fact, what strikes us most in Das’s story is the transformation of Dhani Bauri, the independent-minded rebellious woman into a calm, passive recipient of humiliation when she gets emotionally attached to Gopal Maji’s family as his son Hiru’s foster mother. Dhani, being a childless woman, out of her affection for Hiru contributed her earning for the welfare of Gopal Maji’s family. With the financial assistance received from Dhani, not only Gopal’s two sons were educated but his two daughters were also married off in established families. Unfortunately, Dhani Bauri’s generosity was repaid by Gopal’s family through snatching away her economic liberty and treating her as untouchable. When one pay day Dhani Bauri, who used to hand over her salary to Gopal Maji at the end of every month, gave her own hard-earned money to her nephew Madan for buying books and exercise books, Gopal Maji furiously questioned her liberty of taking financial decisions: “Why did you give him money? He does not take care of you. . . . No, you should not give money to others without my consent” (Das 150). Dhani accepts Gopal’s decision without protest. Not only economic exploitation by Gopal Maji but also the idle gossip of the villagers, who indulged in making “spicy stories” about her, which Dhani had to tolerate for remaining attached to Gopal’s family.

However, the greatest humiliation which Dhani had to suffer was due to the caste hierarchy of Hindu society and inescapably draws our attention to the evil of untouchability functioning as the source of the distress and social inequality experienced

by the Dalits. Das's story is "quite unconventional in its attempt to portray the hierarchy amongst various Dalit communities" (Singha et al. xxxviii). A division into many castes and sub-castes characterizes the Hindu society in India. "This caste system is not based only on a division of society, but also on the existence of a hierarchical notion of superiority" (Limbale 63). Gopal Maji himself was a Shudra by caste but his feeling of superiority in the caste hierarchy as a 'lesser' Dalit never allowed him to accept Dhani Bauri, a "greater" Dalit as an integral part of his family although he never felt any prick of conscience for exploiting Dhani as the mainstay of his family. Confronted with his son's complaints, Gopal shamelessly confesses his compulsion and economic dependence: "I know it too. But I'm quite helpless. I can't let Dhani go because without her contribution, your education would have remained incomplete. You could never have been a teacher without her money" (Das 150). For giving shelter to a 'greater' Dalit, Gopal was also once humiliated and debarred from attending a wedding reception of his own community. Nevertheless, Gopal who was enchanted with the lucrative salary Dhani received from the colliery could not desert Dhani and offered her refuge in a small cottage in his garden. Quite significantly, Das's story highlights the malady of internal divisions among the Dalits which functions as one of the major impediments in the way of their liberation from oppression and social inequality.

The curse of untouchability inflicting the Dalits and denying them human dignity has been presented in its crudest form in the incident concerning Dhani Bauri's humane attempt at saving Hiru's thirsty child from excruciating sufferings in the absence of the child's mother by offering him water from the pitcher in Hiru's kitchen where she had so far been denied access due to her inferior caste identity. Unfortunately, the generosity and magnanimity of the mother in Dhani Bauri is only recompensed by the child's mother's severe reproach for Dhani's violation of the caste barrier and desecration of the household. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar traced the root of the distress of the Dalits in the malady of untouchability: "To sum up, untouchability is not a simple matter; it is the mother of all our poverty and lowliness and it has brought us to the abject state we are in today. If we want to raise ourselves out of it, we must undertake this task. We cannot be saved in any other way. It is a task not for our benefit alone; it is also for the benefit of the nation" (267). The caste-ridden Hindu society has viewed the Dalit as someone who is mean, despicable, and sinful due to his deeds in his past life; the inhuman Hindu religious order has considered the Dalit's shadow, touch and speech to be impure. But as it has been rightly observed, "A human being is not inherently Dalit, neglected or untouchable. It is the system that degrades him in this fashion. When the system is changed, the human being regains his human essence" (Bagul 293). And the worth of a true Dalit narrative lies in its potential for social transformation through a vehement challenge of the inhuman social order and social inequality. In the face of humiliation by Hiru's wife, Das demonstrates Dhani Bauri

silently tolerating the dishonour: “Dhani Masi remained silent throughout. . . . Her eyes moistened and she hurried back to her room with downcast eyes” (Das 151). Dhani Bauri’s calm acceptance and apparent forbearance of indignity perhaps stems from her deep emotional attachment with Hiru’s family, profound affection for Hiru’s son, and her essential humanity. Her maternal qualities propel her to tolerate all injustice. Herein lies the affirmation of her human values. Viewed from this perspective, Dhani Bauri’s transformation does not seem surprising. Das’s portrayal underscores the human qualities of a Dalit woman who is not treated as human and denied human dignity by the larger society. Das strikes at the root of the belief in the Dalits’ being subhuman upheld by Brahminism.

However, Das invests his female protagonist with Dalit consciousness which raises in her mind serious questions regarding the fairness of Gopal Maji’s family’s ingratitude and misconduct meted out to her: “I have given my whole life’s earning, my reputation for this family. Still they look down upon me as an untouchable!” (Das 151). In fact, in her society, caste identity of Dalit women like Dhani Bauri is given more emphasis rather than their human identity. Nevertheless, in terms of human qualities, Dhani establishes herself as a much superior human being compared to the so-called upper caste guardians of her society. What is highlighted in Das’s narrative is a Dalit woman’s preservation of her essential humanity, sense of self-respect and sublimity of spirit even in the face of social exclusion and cruel onslaughts from both caste system and patriarchal social order. Her assertion of identity also occurs through her glorification of womanhood, demonstration of essential human qualities and revolt against oppressive social order founded on caste system. In fact, through his foregrounding of a Dalit woman’s essential humanity, Das lashes at the traditional Hindu religious order which does not treat human beings as humans and regards the Dalits contemptible.

Compared to its other regional counterparts, Bengal society exhibits less acquaintance with the maladies of untouchability or caste-related issues due to the activities of iconic social reformers and long regime of parties inspired by Marxist ideology in Bengal. Undoubtedly, Marxism aimed at the liberation of suffering humanity from social inequality and economic exploitation. Nevertheless, a lot of allegations have been launched against Marxism for remaining indifferent to social discrimination originating from caste system. Babasaheb Ambedkar criticized Indian Communists for not taking up cudgels against Brahmanism which perpetrated the cycle of repression on the downtrodden: “I have heard labour leaders giving eloquent speeches against capitalism. But I have not heard a single labour leader speak against Brahmanism among workers” (qtd. in Limbale 63-4). Sharankumar Limbale also referred to the shortcomings of Marxist movement in India in a conversation with Alok Mukherjee:

Of course, Marxism talks about the dispossessed. In India Marxism came into the hands of the *savarna* people, the Brahmins. The struggle they initiated was the struggle between the capitalist and the dispossessed. What is most regrettable about the Indian Marxists is that they made no effort to understand the caste system. They did not recognize that Marxism in the Indian context had to find for the end of both the caste system and the feudal system. (Limbale 138)

Quite significantly, Das's narrative critiques Marxism and testifies to the inadequacy of Marxist Movements in India in annihilating the great social malaise of untouchability as well as caste-based social discrimination. Despite himself being "a teacher and a great communist ideologue" (Das 152), Hiru Maji who was treated as her own son by Dhani Bauri did nothing to offer her access in the kitchen of his house. A campaigner of the blessings of socialism and a believer in Marxism, Hiru Maji himself failed to transcend his mental barrier in making Dhani Bauri, a member of "untouchable" community an integral part of his family. Instead of working for removal of caste-based social discrimination, Hiru Maji carried the dead body of Dhani Bauri after her death to the bank of the Ganges for cremation "for getting rid of an untouchable" (Das 152).

Trenchant critique of the socioeconomic and cultural designs of Hinduism employed to sustain the hegemony of the brahminical forces has been one of the key strategies of Dalit writers to challenge and subvert such hegemony. In his book *Why I am not a Hindu*, Kancha Ilaiah has exposed the tyrannical nature of Hindu religion and drawn attention to how Hinduism aided by the Brahmins has created and continued cycles of oppression on Dalitbahujans. In Ilaiah's view,

Through the ages it has done this by two methods: (i) creating a constant system which it maintains through various images of Gods and Goddesses, some of whom have been co-opted from the social base that it wanted to exploit; and (ii) when such a consent failed or lost its grip on the masses. It took recourse to violence. In fact, violence has been Hinduism's principal mechanism of control. . . . Thus, the relationship between the Hindu Gods and the Dalitbahujans has been that of the oppressor and oppressed, the manipulator and the manipulated. (70-71)

Das and other Dalit writers have subjected the myths, rituals and beliefs of traditional Hindu religion to scathing criticism. Das's narrative is replete with acerbic utterances or pungent questions which manifest a clear distrust in the existing religious beliefs of Hinduism and demand an answer: "If mere utterance of 'haribol' could

purify the human body and mind why do the ‘untouchables’ remain in the same miserable condition year after year? Why don’t they get social acceptance even when they spend the entire *Baishakh* month uttering ‘haribol?’” (Das 147) or “If cremation in the Ganges could ensure a berth in heaven then thousands of people, who take daily baths in this river throughout its vast expanse from the Himalayas to Kolkata, would all find the bliss of heaven. Why are they still sunk in the mire of poverty? Why do they still lead a life full of untold sufferings?” (152). Such interrogatory rhetoric jolts the readers out of the contrived normativity of traditional Hindu religious belief system, exposes its emptiness and raises the readers’ consciousness of the Dalits’ victimization and exploitation in the prevalent religious and sociocultural order. Unmistakable is also the ironical tone of the first person narrator Nilu’s sarcastic comment in response to Subodhda’s narration of Dhani Bauri’s tragic fate: “Of course, Dhani Masi has found salvation in the holy river. Unfortunately, she didn’t find access to Hiru’s kitchen during her lifetime” (Das 152).

Sharankumar Limbale, who rejects the aesthetics of traditional Hindu or Marathi literature as the yardstick for evaluation of Dalit literature and proposes formulation of a separate aesthetics for it, argues that “The aesthetics of Dalit literature rests on: first, the artists’ social commitment; second, the life-affirming values present in the artistic creation; and third, the ability to raise the reader’s consciousness of fundamental values like equality, freedom, justice and fraternity” (120). Limbale further argues, “That work of Dalit literature will be recognized as beautiful, and, therefore ‘good’, which causes the greatest awakening of Dalit consciousness in the reader” (117). Das’s story fulfils all the aforementioned three criteria considered essential for creation of an outstanding piece of Dalit writing. Not only Das’s narrative successfully awakens its readers’ consciousness of the humiliation, deprivation and exploitation the Dalits undergo in the Brahminical social order but his female protagonist also upholds life-affirming values. And the writer’s social commitment is another important aspect of Das’s story. Sunil Kumar Das, undoubtedly, as a writer with Dalit sensibility portrays his protagonist’s life from Dalit point of view. The female protagonist of the story is portrayed as doubly marginalized – a victim of patriarchy and caste system. Nevertheless, the writer is not reticent about such injustice. The first person narrator Nilu becomes the author’s spokesman and voices his disgust against this social malaise. Das’s narrative is written from Dalit point of view which “constitutes a clear diagnosis of a particular social reality and a sanguine hope for its desirable transformation” (Muktibodh 270). Nilu as the writer’s spokesperson also identifies the caste system and the malady of untouchability as the sources of the sufferings of the Dalits. Through Nilu, Das possibly suggests the necessity of adoption of certain measures for bringing about a social change, a better future for the Dalits: “If Hiru Maji’s family had allowed Dhani Masi access to the kitchen, that would have gone a long way to ensure her

social recognition. It would have been a severe blow to the caste-ridden structure of Hindu society. It would also have led to greater attacks on caste-based social discrimination” (Das 153). Although Das does not depict the triumph of his protagonist against the oppressive caste system, he at least hints at a possible solution which might inspire others to transform the society.

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Women, Nature and Biophilia: The Making of Nature-based Identity in Temsula Ao's "Laburnum for My Head"

Sk Tarik Ali

Power politics, biased categorizations and centre-periphery bipolar divide have characterized most of the history of human civilization. The socially-politically-culturally-economically-linguistically-geographically privileged and dominant class constructs and standardizes the strategic and ideological mechanisms that go into the creation of the periphery. These privileging systematic discourses support and sustain different structures of exclusion and 'othering' that silence the voice of the marginals within the mainstream tenor. This construction of the difference and inequality creates and formalizes a hegemonic power structure that dictates certain normative values for a particular category and such normative values, unjustly established, ratify the exploitation of that particular group. The trajectories of the oppression of these "wretched of the earth"¹ are multiple - the imperialist, the economic, the ethnic, the political, the gendered, and many others. The exploitative politics and control mechanisms have always attempted to keep these disempowered, dispossessed, and dehumanized others voiceless and identity-less in a liminal space providing a sense of superiority to the people living in the centre to enjoy and exercise their power and authority over these subalterns.

One of the notable centre-periphery binaries that characterize the human society from the very moment of its inception is the man-woman dualism that has been legitimized and perpetuated by the hegemonic masculinities. The discourses of domination and hierarchical social fabric, endorsed by religious scriptures and social institutions, have relegated women to a helplessly inferior position. The interplay of patriarchy and the multiple modes of social control have positioned the women as sexual objects who have been denied their subjectivity on the basis of any other identical means. This androcentric aggression operates in one way or another in all human societies across the world. These socio-patriarchal norms and the systematic structuration and imposition of gender roles have turned the women into subaltern subjects striving towards voicing their subaltern consciousness.

Caught up in the discourses of power and domination, women have recourse to various means of expression to give a powerful voice to their subjectivity. Resisting the regulatory discourses of patriarchal enterprise, they have always attempted to create a room of their own². They have always been in search of a convenient language

for exploring their repressed unconsciousness. For the most part, they have fallen back on their creative self articulating their narratives in different modes of literary and cultural production. They have made use of cinematic, performative and literary media for creating, representing, and documenting an alternative voice and narrative that deconstruct the structures of patriarchal discourse. This exploration of their subjectivity and female consciousness is an instrument for questioning and challenging their subjugated position in the phallogocentric Symbolic order and creating their own spaces of emancipation and empowerment.

One of the distinctive ways of self-assertion and identity formation for women is their affinity toward and association with nature and its non-human organisms. Indeed, this issue of woman-nature relation has received multiple responses from critics and academics and the emergence of the academic discipline of Ecofeminism has problematized the issue to a great extent. The theoretical idea of Ecofeminism, which “consists in many different ideas and actions, and as a result cannot be generalized easily”,(Carlassare 89) has complicated and politicized the subject of woman-nature affiliation and two contrasting views have emerged on the issue. As comments Deane-Drummond: “The association women with nature is ambiguous with a variegated response among (eco-)feminists, ranging from affirmation to rejection. Broadly, while some affirm an association of women and nature, others believe that such a link reinforces oppression of both” (Drummond 186). One group of ecofeminists holds the view that the construction and celebration of symbolic connections between women and nature place both of them in a vulnerable position to be conquered and mastered. They unambiguously consider “these symbolic and metaphoric constructions of women and nature as legitimization for men’s control of nature and women’s bodies” (Sachs 2).

There is another school of ecofeminist thought that “attempt[s] to reclaim an association (of women) with the natural world in order to debunk those patriarchal myths of power” (Steele 102). Ecofeminists like Ynestra King believe that the woman-nature connectivity provides a vantage ground to women for exercising and asserting their individuality and subjectivity. They “propose that through embracing, celebrating and redefining women’s relation with nature, these connections can offer potential emancipation for both women and nature” (Sachs 30). This celebration of women’s connectedness to nature has some obvious connection with the apolitical and gender-neutral concept of “Biophilia” that speaks of innate (though hypothetical) human affinity toward nature.

In the year 1984, the distinguished American biologist and naturalist Edward.O.Wilson came forward with his concept of “Biophilia”, which he defined as “the connections that human beings subconsciously seek with the rest of life” (Wilson 350). The concept was first introduced by the German philosopher and psychologist

Erich Fromm and later it was popularised globally by Wilson in his essay of the same name. Irrespective of gender, Biophilia speaks of “the innate human tendency to focus on and affiliate with life-form and like-like processes.” (Joye & Block 190). Although the academic discipline of folkbiology³ “indicates that human beings are equipped with cognitive mechanisms to think and reason about biological entity” (Joyce & Block 193), no particular and final conclusion has been drawn regarding this “intimate emotional link between humans and the living world” (Joye & Block 191). This unresolved question of genetic inheritance has kept Biophilia still in the state of hypothesis. Whereas Wilson has developed his concept of Biophilia as an inherent affinity toward nature, later critics like Katcher and Wilkins have questioned this proposition and opined that Biophilia is not an innate emotional connection with nature; rather it is learned through ethical principles that operate in encountering the reality of life⁴. Whether it is inherent or learned has been, and is still, under research and discussion; what concerns us the most at present is the fact that we all possess a love for and attachment to nature and its elements consciously and unconsciously. And this woman-nature solidarity has been used as “a universal (environment) ethic for conserving biodiversity”⁵ in the face of global environmental crisis and anthropogenic climate change in the present age of anthropocene.

Although biophilia is a gender-unbiased concept, many critics have delved into the debate of whether women are closer to nature than men or the vice versa. And this also generates conflicting opinions: whereas one group of ecofeminists debunks this myth of woman-nature connection by considering it as a social-patriarchal construction that places women close to nature and thereby legitimise their persecution, there is another variety of ecofeminist thoughts that believes that there exists a special and intimate connection between women and nature. Critics like Vandana Shiva⁶ hold the view that women are closer to nature than men “because of their biology, that is, their reproductive functions” (Sayers 108). In the Third World developing countries, in particular, women have a very close and symbiotic relationship with nature because of their direct dependence on and access to forest resources for sustenance and survival.

Bearing in mind these long-entertained narratives of woman-nature association, we can assume that Biophilia is much less active in men than women who possess an inclination to affiliate with nature and its elements. And sometimes it is their biophilia, their love for and emotional affinity toward nature that give the women an escape route from the dominant masculine Symbolic order. It is their healthy and reciprocal association with nature that sometimes provides them a space of their own where they can exercise their individuality and subjectivity. Lentina, the female protagonist in Temsula Ao’s short story “Laburnum for My Head” is a case in study; she demonstrates how nature acts as the vehicle of liberation and empowerment for her when she has been forced into a voiceless existence in a male-dominated society. It is her dendrophilia

without the sexual connotations the word carries, or anthophilia in particular that becomes a potent weapon for emancipation and identity formation in an otherwise marginal existence.

The Padma Shri Tamsula Ao is one of the distinguished Italian Anglophone writers from the North-East, the part of the Republic of India that carries the stigma of “troubled periphery”⁷⁷ for years. Writers from this politically troubled and economically-geographically peripheral zone usually focus on highlighting the social, cultural, economic and political affairs of the particular territory. A poet, short story writer and ethnographer, Tamsula Ao also well explores the essential realities of the North-East in her writings. Ao’s creative output has been powerful means of reflecting cultural codes, religious values and ethical ideologies of the particular territory in their vast and varied forms. But she raises her voice against the established tendency of categorizing north-east literature as mere “contestations”: Ao writes: “The context of our writing may be different, even exotic at times. But all said and done it is about the life we know and want to share with our fellow citizens who have somehow always looked at us through the prism of ‘otherness, and suspicion” (Ao 170). Ao, in her writings, provides a convincingly authentic picture of the Ao Naga reality and transforms the local into the universal. In this context, her Sahitya Academy Award winning collection of short stories *Laburnum for My Head* bears testimony of her commitment to the conversion of the local into the universal. The eight stories in the collection “embrace a gamut of emotions. Heart-rending, witty and riddled with irony, these stories depict a deep understanding of the human condition.”⁷⁸ Kamaldeep Kaur rightly reviewed: “Though set in North-Eastern locales, they describe the universal human pursuits of joy and experiences of pain...”. And the title story of the collection explores an old woman’s emotional affinity toward nature, her opposition to the normative values and her nature-based identity formation.

The story “Laburnum for My Head” is “the story of the un-dramatic life of an ordinary woman who cherished one single passionate wish that a humble laburnum tree should bloom once a year on her crown” (20). Lentina, the female protagonist, possesses an ‘unusual’ and extraordinary fascination for the “humble Indian laburnum” (1) with “its blossom of yellow mellow beauty” (1). The story deals with Lentina’s an overpowering yearning of having “some laburnum bushes in her garden” (2) first and then it takes a “whimsical’ turn with her longing of having a “laburnum tree planted on the grave, one which would live on over her remains instead of a silly headstone...” (4). The narrative comes to an end with Lentina’s sublime death only after the fulfilment of her long-cherished yearning “when the laburnum tree, planted on the gravesite in the new cemetery of the sleepy little town, bursts forth in all its glory of buttery-yellow splendour” (20). And throughout the narrative, it is Lentina’s unique love of the laburnum tree with its “yellow wonders” (5), her biophilia, that gives her an identity of her own.

The stereotypical idea of decorating a graveyard with concrete structures is challenged by her biophilia that advocates green-cemetery lavishly eco-decorated without much intervention of humans and their systems. And in this way her dendrophilia and anthophilia turn out to be potent weapons for self-assertion and the alleviation of her psychological alienation in a male-oriented social order.

It is true that Lentina has not been subject to explicit patriarchal tyranny and subjugation in the story. But there is no denying that she suffers from a sense of alienation in a human society where discourses are predominantly dominated by the patriarchal thought. It is a male-dominated society where Lentina is not allowed to speak of and fulfil her fervent longing. That's why when the members of this patriarchal social system came to know Lentina's dendrophilia, it appeared 'impulsive' and 'queer' to them. It is because of this exploitive and patriarchal mindset and its objection to female subjectivity that Lentina has to pursue her ardent desire confidentially. Her strong yet 'strange' emotional bond with the laburnum was considered as "unhealthy fetish" (3) by her own family members who represent the regulatory discourses in the story. They regarded her "deep-seated longing for the yellow wonders" (5) as a "wild scheme (10), a "crazy plan" (10). Mapu, the driver who assisted Lentina in fulfilling her wish, also harbour the same patriarchal view initially when he told Lentina: "But madam, your place is earmarked beside my master." (6). Almost none of them had the insight to understand her sense of uncontaminated connection with nature, her biophilia. And it is this utter indifference on the part of the patri-society to her biophilia that goes into the creation of her peripheral position in the society.

In this state of psychological difference, it is only Lentina's emotional affiliation with nature that gives her an agency and subjectivity in the narrative. Her anthophilic self is full of love of and admiration for the "show of yellow splendour" (2), because it awakens and reminds her of her femininity: "She had always admired these yellow flowers for what she thought was her femininity." (2) The idea of having an eco-cemetery is actually the tangible manifestation of her desire to secure mental peace and quietude in a psychologically isolated existence. Her nature mindedness gives Lentina due mental strength to fight with all the odds that stand in the way of the fulfilment of her biophilic desire of having a laburnum tree close to her. And when the little laburnum tree planted on her gravesite "was awash with buttery-yellow blossoms" (18), she could feel "it in (her) bones" (18). Again it is the inclusion of the laburnum in herself and her desire to see the flowers bloom that "seemed to provide her with the will to live where food and medicines seemed to have failed" (15). This is something that relates Ao's Lentina to O. Henry's Johnsy in "The Last Leaf" where the young girl develops an emotional connectivity with the leaves of an ivy tree and it is these leaves that decide her will in the tension between life and death. Lentina was able to

achieve an identity of her own, at least to some extent when “the sons too, seeming a new spirit in their mother, began to ask for her advice on business and family matters, something which had never happened during the father’s lifetime” (15). Finally, Lentina died a relaxed death only after the fulfilment of her long-cherished desire and thereby asserting her biophilic subjectivity: “That particular spot displays nothing that man has improvised: only nature, who does not possess any script, abides there...” (2).

Ao’s Lentina also contested the socio-patriarchal norms when she “surprised everyone, including herself, by announcing that she was going to accompany her husband on his last journey” (4), because it is unusual for an Indian woman to take active part in the last rites of her husband in the gravesite. And her voice of dissent appears more powerful when she declares: “I do not wish to be buried among the ridiculous stone monuments of big cemetery. I need a place where there will be nothing but beautiful trees over my grave” (9). Her ethical and eco-sensitive self feels completely distressed at the sight of the cemetery that “has thus become choked with specimens of human conceit” (1). Her biophilia, her solidarity with nature and its systems and processes, deconstructs this long-established tradition of erecting concrete structures in the gravesite and gifts to the town a green-cemetery where “flowering bushes take root, blooming in their own seasons on the little mounds dotting the landscape. Hibiscus, gardenia, bottle-brush, camellia, oleander and croton bushes of all hues comprise the variety of flowering plants....(and) in the entire terrain, there is so far, only one laburnum tree...standing tall over the other plants, flourishing in perfect co-existence, in an environment liberated from all human pretensions to immortality” (20). So, Lentina’s ‘weird’ thought and action ultimately turn out to be powerful weapons of enhancing ecological thinking and affecting doing that are of great significance in the present age of human-induced environmental pollution and degradation, and relentless deforestation. Her celebration of the ethics and praxis of biocentrism becomes the form of resistance and unleashing the marginalized voice of a woman in a male-oriented society. In the story, the woman speaks through her biophilia that helps her in a nature-based identity formation. It is the laburnum tree with its wonderful yellow flowers that “is her kingdom as a whole; when she takes possession of it; she also proudly takes possession of herself.” (Beauvior 362).

Lentina’s subordination and her resistance through the making of a nature-oriented identity bring to mind a lonely woman’s subjection to male chauvinism and her struggle at identity formation through her dendrophilia and anthrophilia, her emotional connectivity with a flowering tree, namely the Chrysanthemums, as represented in John Steinbeck’s celebrated work of fiction “The Chrysanthemums”. In the story, the female protagonist Elisa Allen, “the lady [Steinbeck] can’t get out of his mind”¹⁰ nurtures an anthophilic passion for and association with the yellow chrysanthemums that give her “the strength, power and energy that lie just beneath her frustration with her female role” (Railsback

& Meyer 59). Like Lentina, Elisa, a woman bound by the socio-patriarchal discourses, represented by her “metallic, mechanistic” husband and the nameless tinker in the story, finds her subjectivity and emancipation in her biophilia. Thus, women’s use of their biophilia in resisting the androcentric paradigms is not restricted to either time or place. At all times and in all parts of the world, women’s emotional affiliation with nature and its systems and processes gives them the fortitude to question the andro/anthropocentric instrumentalist worldview and the twin marginalization of women and nature. At the same time, this biophilic affinity helps them form a nature-oriented identity in the face of patriarchal dictates and the rigid framework of identity politics.

Notes

All references to the story “Laburnum for my Head” are indicated with page number in parenthesis.

1. This is the title of Franz Fanon’s seminal theoretical work in postcolonial theory. Published in 1961 this book is one of the foundational works on which postcolonial studies developed later. This book provides a clinical socio-psychological analysis of the effects of the process of colonization on native minds. It further goes into a critical survey of the creation and celebration of several ideological binaries that formalize the colonial domination.
2. This idea has its roots in Virginia Woolf’s epoch-making work of feminist literary criticism, *A Room of One’s Own* (1929). In the form of an extended essay, the book is an attempt to investigate into the politics of representation of women in fiction and the place of women writers in the socio-patriarchal process of ‘canon formation’. It explores a rethinking of the female position in terms of their marginal standing in society and literature.
3. See the details about this recently emerged academic discipline in the book *Folkbiology* (1999), edited by Douglas L. Medin and Scott Atran, and published by the MIT press, Massachusetts.
4. For details one can go through the essay “Dialogue with Animals: Its Nature and Culture” by A. Katcher and G. Wilkins. The essay was included in the S. Kellert and E.O. Wilson edited pioneering work on biophilia, namely *The Biophilia Hypothesis* (1993).
5. This is a quotation from the title of John P. Simaika and Michael J. Samways’s article “Biophilia as a Universal Ethic for Conserving Biodiversity”, published in the *Conservation Biology*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (June 2010), pp. 903-906.
6. Dr. Vandana Shiva is a celebrated Indian environmental thinker, activist and ecofeminist. Founder of the Navdanya, Shiva is widely known for her work on the human-nature interactions, particularly in the Indian context. For more details, visit < <http://vandanashiva.com/>>.
7. This phrase is taken from Subir Bhaumik’s well-known book on the North-East *Troubled Periphery: The Crisis of India’s North East* (2009) where the writer has delved into types of crises and conflicts in the zone that have obstructed its development.
8. This extract is from the blurb of the book *Laburnum for my Head: Stories*, which is cited

below.

9. This quotation is from Kamaldeep Kaur's review of *Laburnum for my Head: Stories*, Published as "Evocative Tales" in *The Tribune* on 2 May 2010. <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2010/20100502/spectrum/book4.htm>.
10. As quoted in Susan Shillinglaw essay "'The Chrysanthemums': Steinbeck's Pygmalion", published in the book *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: John Steinbeck's Short Stories* (2011).

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a wagon misses its star
Aaron Swartz - Hacker or Hacktivist?

B. Parvathi

Are geniuses misfits in the most organized human associations? Do they very often happen to be hypersensitive individuals? Are geniuses commonly afflicted with some debilitating physical condition? Does creativity come hand in hand with a desire for perfection coupled with a dissatisfaction about how the world functions? Does it result in a life wasted against the tide of conformity? Are parental preconceptions of free development at the root of non conformist behaviour in their progeny? Does a too well defined application of law take its toll? And what is the extent to which order can be ruffled in the several areas of public life are the many questions that the book *The Idealist* raises about Aaron Swartz. The answers have to be in the affirmative in the case of Aaron who believed that he could make some part of digitized knowledge available for the third world without having anyone to beg someone for it or pay for it.

Aaron Swartz was a wizard of a programmer at the age of thirteen. This young man did not go through regular schooling because his father believed in giving his son the freedom in charting his own course of ‘education’ and development. He was not after money but millions accrued into his account because of his “magical powers” at computer programming even when he was a teenager. This money, however, was not enough to fight his arrest in 2011 and the charges of digital theft and felony against him. Aaron was an avid reader who summarized difficult narratives and uploaded seventy of these— including Kafka’s *The Trial*— for easy reading. Chomsky’s *Understanding Power* impressed Aaron’s young mind. He was, above all, a person who hated positions of authority and domination of all kinds. He could not absolutely do anything that would put him in a dominant place —be it the very simple act of asking for a book from the librarian, or giving an ‘order’ to a waitress in restaurants! He suffered from a condition of acute ulcerous colitis. He was associated with the “free culture movement” which believed in removing barriers to information access. Aaron Swartz committed suicide on January 11, 2013. One would not have heard of this young man at all on this side of the globe but for Justin Peters.

Justin Peters’ book *The Idealist Aaron Swartz And The Rise Of Free Culture On The Internet* is an excellent effort which shows how a host of things became available at the click of a button in the present era. It speaks about the various stages through which a portion of this intellectual harvest is freely available today for academics

and public through the internet. *The Idealist* happened to be a random pick for me from the ‘New Arrivals’ shelf on the first floor of Jack Langson Library, University of California, Irvine. I turned its pages, and the few paragraphs it made me read were so compelling that it needed more visits to the library made possible thanks to its friendly staff and its courteous Librarian. *The Idealist*, published last year that is 2016 by Scribner, An Imprint of Simon & Schuster Inc. New York, was very well received in USA. It is journalist Peters’ first book which grew from an article he wrote on Aaron Swartz for the online magazine *Slate* after the young man’s death at the age of twenty six.

Aaron called himself a hacker. “In the hacker viewpoint, any system could benefit from an easy flow of information, a concept known as transparency in the social sciences.” A hacktivist is one who puts computers and computer networks to subversive use to promote a political agenda or a social change. As one involved in a movement called “free culture”—the term ‘free’ meaning unrestricted access to information—he downloaded millions of articles from academic journals in the MIT campus from the journal storage digital library called JSTOR founded in 1995. “Originally containing digitized back issues of academic journals, it now also includes books and primary sources, and current issues of journals. It provides full-text searches of almost 2,000 journals.” JSTOR, after its initial displeasure however, relented to ignore the charges filed against Aaron.

It is common knowledge that MIT—a premier institution, is reputed for its research output and its very liberal campus atmosphere. The institution took an indulgent view and delight as its youth played pranks on the campus. It encouraged their creativity and celebrated their achievements. It was also well known that security at MIT was negligible. Aaron’s father Robert Swartz worked for the institution and it is no wonder that Aaron’s tingling fingers took the route to MIT servers. Recurrent crashing of the institution’s servers led the trail of investigation to Aaron. He was booked for downloading papers from research journals without permission. An FBI investigation followed. His friends said if only he mentioned they could have done the downloading for him without drawing any attention. But Aaron did not want someone else to do it for him in a clandestine manner. It was his firm belief that the downloading was for public good. With this in mind Aaron initiated over 200,000 download sessions in a single hour! in the year 2010. He made a “robotic harvesting” of articles ignoring copyright regulations to achieve his goal of placing academic journals in public domain. Though his act could never be equated with indulging in financial fraud he could still be convicted on charges of felony for his violation of regulation.

Aaron’s act throws light on the question of intellectual/ institutional copyright versus such unpermitted acts of making knowledge resources available in the electronic

public domain. The generally liberal MIT chose to be silent and neutral on this issue and the investigating officers of FBI went by the book. At first Aaron put up a brave front but the later procedures did unnerve him. On a calm January evening he hanged himself without giving his friends even a faint idea of his intention. Aaron's suicide came as a shock to all. His father Robert Swartz simply said that Aaron did not commit suicide—that the system had killed him. Doctors who have had patients with ulcerous colitis opined that disruptive liver functioning most often drives such patients like Aaron to take this sudden extreme unexpected step to suicide.

Young Aaron believed that any reluctance to embrace free culture is a function of greed. He believed that 'computer programmers have an ethical responsibility to advance public welfare'. Carl Malamud is a data liberation activist who launched a non-profit website called public.resource.org to host public domain data sets of all sorts. He took the long route in sourcing data to public domain. Aaron unlike Carl Malamud made a short cut in violating PACER and JSTOR's terms and conditions of use. Peters says that Aaron 'sacrificed caution for celerity' and paid the price for it. In his zeal as convener of "Progressive Change Campaign Committee" which comprised political activists of grand ambitions and limited budgets (and perhaps abilities too) he tried to be a one man OCLC—Online Computer Library Centre. Justin Peters writes in one place that wanton scattering of books in a library is one thing and the toppling of bookshelves another altogether. What this young man of twenty six did was like crashing into book shelves in his zeal for grabbing books. Aaron's magical digital command did not have the nerve either to justify his stand and fight, or yield to plead guilty, and he chose the third option—to end his life.

Journalist turned author Justin Peters gives remarkable insight into the story of copyright matters and internet activism in *The Idealist* tracing it to England and Queen Anne's time and American Noah Webster's time. The book divulges little known facts about the hard times English writers like Dickens and others faced in nineteenth century because the financial gain they had from sale of their works in America was a pittance compared to what printers gained from printing cheap editions of English novels. He also unfurls an unknown fraction of the history of free and young America. It would be very insensitive on my part to merely acknowledge Justin Peters as an effective writer, that his approach to the subject of copy right matters, internet and social concerns is excellent and captivating. Anyone who picks up this book will not miss its brilliance as well as its pain at the ending of a life so gifted and so wasted; yet as author of this partial biography Peters does not lose sight of the steady ways of mature activists such as Malamud or Lessig and their efforts to give greater access to knowledge. It is this balance of view which ranks Justin Peters with the best of contemporary writers.

Notes

1. Justin Peters : *The Idealist Aaron Swartz And The Rise Of Free Culture On The Internet*, published by SCRIBNER, An Imprint of Simon & Schuster, Inc.(1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York ,NY 10020) 2016.
2. I wish to express my thanks to the Librarian and staff of Jack Langson Library, University of California, Irvine, U.S.A.

***Stories of Social Awakening: Reflection of Dalit Refugee
Lives of Bengal* by Jatin Bala ed. Jaydeep Sarangi,
Authorspress, 2017, ₹350/\$20 ISBN: 978-93-5207-543-0**

M. B. Gaijan

The book is a story collection of Dalit and refugee lives of Bengal by Jatin Bala originally written in Bangala. It is a collection of selected stories of Mr. Bala translated by different scholars and edited by Dr. Jaydeep Sarangi. The book is forwarded by Dr. Antonia Navarro-Tejero, Universidad de Cordoba, Spain with remark, "This volume is a significant contribution to a broader representation of Indian literatures, which can be explored as a bridge between multilingual and multicultural India and the global audience. " (8)* In the editorial note of the collection Dr. Jaydeep Sarangi has noted about the collection, "...the book is a humble attempt to capture the varied experiences of refugees and dalits in the Indian subcontinent of a specific region." (11). Thus the story collection is a valuable work to understand Indian literature especially Bengali literature.

Dalits are the citizens of the Republic of India. But according to caste hierarchy and traditional belief they are low in social structure. It was believed earlier that even their shadow was polluting and untouchable. Indian society has been and still is a caste-ridden society. In this society Dalits become frequently victims of injustice. Exploitations, oppressions and cruelties are heaped on them by the orthodox upper castes. In the recent Indian history, partition is a painful episode. Especially the low caste Hindu refugees who came to India from Bangladesh were of nowhere. They remained unwanted, uprooted human mass sufferer for years. Their saga of suffering is unimaginable. This collection presents live pictures their suffering.

By the constitutions of the Republic of India any discrimination on the basis of caste, class, gender or race is a punishable offense. But still even in this digital era caste plays very significant role in Indian society. so the Dalits suffer miserably.

Through the stories in the volume under discussion Mr. Bala express his thoughts on Dalits' condition, sufferings, Dalit writings and Dr. Ambedkar's contribution to Dalit welfare. Mr. Bala, in his talk with Dr. Jaydeep Sarangi given at the end of collection says about his struggle in life - without parents, with only his brother how he has passed his childhood days in the refugee camps in India. Mr. Bala has expressed his helplessness, rootlessness and his thoughts on Dalit writings -

Dalit literature intends to articulate this (prejudiced social

behaviour) social, cultural, political and religious oppression perpetrated in this country and emblematises a fight against untouchability and the resultant socio-economic divide.... Their works naturally embody realistically different incidents, events, situations and circumstances of Dalit life, projects the injustice meted out to them by the social and temporal milieu. This portrayal is prompted partly by their aesthetic sensibility and to an extent, by their personal intensions of creating a casteless society, of fostering their philosophy of life, and generating awareness about Dalit condition. (168-169)

It helps the readers to feel the pulse of Dalit writings and get an inkling into Mr. Bala's views on mainstream writings.

West Bengal, India is the land of genius and Noble laureates. After independence political ideology of the communists governed the state where social harmony and casteless society began to take root. But social reality remained somewhat different. Mr. Jatin Bala has tried to present socio-cultural and political reality through these twelve stories of this collection. Each story of the collection is unique and appealing.

'Story of the Consciousness' by Jahar Sarkar is the opening story of the collection. Jahar is the lifelong fighter against injustice and cruelties. The story presents how Dalit refugees were treated. It also exposes political pomp. He registers his protest thus, "The greatest enemy of our country is religion and caste. Human beings are not allowed to lead free life like the ox trudging around an oil press. So I fight against inequality meted out in the name of caste and religion." (18) The ending of the story is the climax of Jahar's suffering. Twenty Dalits' throats were slit by the orthodox Brahmins. Jahar could not stand the horrid spectacle. He took up his pen as a mad man hurls stone at passersby in protest against cruelties inflicted upon him.

'Resurrection' is the story of Atul Mistri, a Dalit refugee. Partition plight has been pathetically narrated in the story. Caste hatred adds fuel to the fire. He narrates his life thus - "Hunger makes a human being inhuman. A man kills another because of hunger. These slums are really jungle...Man eaters, ferocious animals are moving fearlessly in this jungle..." (28) Atul's daughter Maya becomes victim of cruelty - "She hesitates to open herself as a commodity to male sexual desire. She felt it is an insult to womanhood." (30) Starving humanity appeals every reader. At the end, Maya's marriage brings some relief.

'Bloody Scyth' is the story of unbearable injustice and its consequence. Mani Mohan bears injustice as much as a man can bear. But it has also a limit. Starvation and exploitation of Asu Daktar is unbearable. Hence he uses his scythe.

‘The Man Called Ratan’ is a matchless story of a carpenter. He frequently becomes victim of injustice and cruelty on account of his caste. Upper caste contractor Gopal Chatterjee treats him inhumanly. But Ratan saves him at the critical moment. At the end of the story Gopal realizes the truth and says; “Brother Ratan, forgive me. Please forgive me, Brother.” (69)

‘The Two Ends of Broken Bridge’ is an appealing story of *Khokan*, a Dalit who was fed by a Muslim mother out of motherly affection. Riots separate the family. One is in Bangladesh and the other is an unwanted Dalit in India. But they are united in old age when *Amma* comes to India for medical treatment. She says - “Son, now that you have arrived, I know I know that I’m safe.”(86)

‘Akaipur in Flames’ is a crude reality of Dalit suffering. Basona’s kid, Sunita soiled the verandah of the temple. So infuriated Rampada Mishra declares - “Sunita has to be sacrificed in front of the temple and the dirty spot will have to be washed with her blood.” (89) He proclaims that sacrifice is the only solution. At end of the story all Dalits unite and fight. It is very disturbing story that ends in an ennobling note of resistance.

‘Fire to Deaden Starvation’ is a picture of how the poor are exploited by upper caste moneylenders. Bhaktaram and pregnant wife Dukhi starve but the exploitation and oppression do not end.

‘Martyr’ is a crude picture of riots and anarchy. But among the rioters a saint like human being is found. He saves human beings. But he is butchered by the rioters. He is martyr for them who were saved by him.

‘A Montage of Shadow’ is a story that presents shocking images of suffering humanity. Four moving images have been presented. The second image is very pathetic indeed. Pakhi, an orphan living with her aunt, actively participate in women empowerment through education. But Pakhi becomes a victim of male cruelty. The story represents picture of rural India.

‘Humanity is Truth’ is a story that presents humanity from a different perspective. Having quarrelled with his wife Mira, Mohan once goes to the “room of the forbidden quarter” (134) The ‘girl’ tells her story - how she was sold to the brothel by her distant relative though she is a married. She requested Mohan to inform her father. Later on Mohan writes a letter and the girl is rescued.

‘Seed of Consciousness’ is a love story of the Dalit couple Mukut Bakshi and his wife Maya. Deben Biswas, the owner of Sarkar Laddu Factory where the couple worked exploit the employees mercilessly. He does not pay enough and exploits all workers. Maya wears a torn saree. She has been demanding a new one for months much to Mukut’s displeasure. Being enraged Mukut treats Maya badly. She leaves

her husband and goes to her father's home. But strong love happily unites the couple.

'Reminiscences of Life at Refugee Camps' is the tragic suffering of the writer from one refugee camp to another. Crude realities of the refugee camps are horrible, unimaginable - "the inadequate arrangements for providing water and sanitation at the camp, made life here a living hell- a hell into which the refugees were dumped by the authorities and then left to fend for themselves".(158) The story takes a dig at political policies and attitudes of the officials in power. It is against this sort of condition the writer survived, studied and emerged as good human being.

Translations of the stories are highly engaging. Each story touches the readers in some way or the other. No exaggeration and deviation from the original is to be found in the translated stories. The same feelings as encoded in the original have been effectively recreated by the translators in a matchless style.

Above all, the work is most probably the first of its kind in West Bengal. The book fitly presents a moving image of the Dalits and refugees in West Bengal .

* All parenthetical citations here are from the text mentioned in the title. (*Stories of Social Awakening: Reflection of Dalit Refugee Lives of Bengal*)

Dalit Feminist Activist Writes Back: Bama Faustina in Conversation with Jaydeep Sarangi

Jaydeep Sarangi

Bama (b. 1958), also known as Bama Faustina Soosairaj, is a Tamil, Dalit feminist, teacher and writer. Her autobiographical novel *Karukku* (1992) chronicles the joys and sorrows experienced by Dalit Christian women in Tamil Nadu. She subsequently wrote two more novels, *Sangati* (1994) and *Vanmam* (2002) along with two collections of short stories: *Kusumbukkaran* (1996) and *Oru Tattvum Erumaiyum* (2003). Bama was born as Faustina Mary Fatima Rani in a Roman Catholic family from Puthupatti in the then Madras State. Later she adopted 'Bama' as her pen name. Susairaj was her father and Sebasthiamma, her mother. Bama's novels focus on caste and gender discrimination. She propagates Dalit feminism through her writings.

J.S.: Bama, welcome to this discussion. Do you remember your childhood days?

Bama: I was born and brought up in a Dalit Christian family in W. Puthupatty, a small village in South Tamil Nadu. I completed eighth standard in the village school. While I was in my village, I came to know about different castes and experienced a lot of discrimination based on caste, class and gender. I was treated inhumanly and faced a lot of discrimination and rejection. During school holidays I used to accompany my grandmother to work in the landlord's fields. I have seen how my grandmother was ill-treated because of her caste. I grew up in my village experiencing all kinds of atrocities and untouchabilities. After completing eighth standard, I was sent to a nearby town for higher studies.

J.S.: Bama, will you be able to tell us your experiences of caste discrimination during the childhood?

Bama: My grandmother used to work in the upper caste landlord's fields. As a child I used to go with her during school holidays. My grandma used to tell me not to go near that upper caste people and not to touch their things because we are low caste and they are high caste. But I could not understand anything then. The upper caste people also used to chase us away using abusive words whenever they saw us.

After cleaning the cowsheds outside the upper caste people's house the upper caste lady used to pour some stale food in my grandmother's vessel in the cowshed itself. My grandma and I used to stay at a distance to get that food which cannot be

eaten. They never allow us to enter into their house and they never had come to our area side for any purpose.

While travelling in the public transport upper caste people never used to sit near Dalits and Dalits had to get up and give their seats to upper caste people and they had to keep standing. While waiting for buses in the bus stop also we were segregated and we had to wait till they board the bus.

There is a school in the upper caste area meant only for upper caste children. Due to caste discrimination Dalit children were not given admission there when I was a child. The school I studied one particular teacher used to ask only Dalit children to remove the shit and dead corpse of birds and animals in the school ground. While we were cleaning the upper caste children used to sit and watch us with sarcastic look and smile on their faces which hurt us terribly.

J.S.: What according to you is Dalit Literature?

Bama: It is the literature of oppressed people, telling about their pains, agonies, disappointments, defeats, humiliations, oppressions and depressions. It also speaks about their vibrant culture, dreams, values, convictions and their struggle for annihilation of caste in order to build a casteless society. It reveals their resistant and rebellious character, their strength and stamina to live amidst all odds and their resilient nature to love life and live it happily. It brings out their inborn tendency to celebrate life and to fight against the caste ridden society by breaking through this inhuman system without breaking themselves. It liberates them and gives them their identity. It heals them and strengthens them to fight for their rights.

J.S.: Who are the Dalits in India?

Bama: People who are discriminated against and socially excluded on account of their caste and who militantly oppose such a system of discrimination and dehumanisation are Dalits. It also includes people who are marginalised based on class and gender.

J.S.: Would you please share some of your experiences regarding caste stratification in India?

Bama: I cannot tell about my experience about caste stratification in India – I can share my experience of Tamil Nadu. Here we have a lot of castes in a hierarchical order and the lowest are the Dalits. My experiences here are dehumanising – wherever I go, whatever I do and however I try, I cannot escape from this caste tentacles. Each caste tries to dominate and suppress the other below it. Not only from womb to tomb, but even after one's death caste follows and segregates – even in the graves. Stratification of caste is faced at every level – education, employment, religion, marriage, everywhere.

J.S.: You are a teacher, a writer, a Dalit Christian, a Tamil woman. How do you look at your identity?

Bama: All these describe my identity. What I value and cherish most is my identity as a human being.

J.S.: Your mother worked as a coolie who didn't get the privilege of education. How did she contribute to your identity?

Bama: My mother was a hard-working woman and what I am today, I attribute to her. She was a very loving, simple and beautiful woman. She was a philosopher and guide to me. I have inherited a lot of values and convictions from her which enable me now to face the hardships of this caste-ridden male dominated society. She had brought me up as a sensitive human being with love and dignity.

J.S.: How about your father?

Bama: My father was a Lt Colonel in the Indian Army. He appeared to be a harsh and tough man but actually was a very soft hearted and loving person. I had seen him as a man who went out of his way to help others and to fight for social justice and liberation. He also had the capacity to write songs, dramas and stories. He never published his works. I was always scared of him as I somehow had picked up the idea that he didn't like me as he liked his other children.

J.S.: Who are the writers who inspired you in your formative days?

Bama: In my formative days I had not read many books as there was no possibility of getting books in my village. So I used to read whatever books my elder brother used to bring home from the library. Those days I liked Jeyankanthan's writings.

J.S.: Who are the leading Dalit writers in your state?

Bama: There are many writers, both men and women, writing in different genres. Poomani, Raj Gowthaman, Imayam, Abimani, Vizhi. Pa. Idhayanventhan, Azhakia Periyavan, Sivakami, Sukirtha Rani are some of them.

J.S.: Why do you write?

Bama: I write because I think it is the duty and responsibility to write the stories of my people. I also feel that by writing my own wounds are healed and I am liberated and renewed.

J.S.: What is the basic theme of *Karukku*?

Bama: It is the living story of a particular group of Dalit people in a particular village of which the narrator (myself) is a part and parcel. It talks about their style of living, their hard work, their culture, their belief system, their entertainment, their spirituality,

their love, their fight, their struggles, their pain and agony, their joys and sorrows, their tears and dreams.

J.S.: Do you like the tag ‘Dalit Feminism’?

Bama: Yes. The life of a Dalit woman is totally different from a non-Dalit woman. So, Dalit feminism is a must.

J.S.: What makes Dalit autobiographies so popular among the readers?

Bama: It is because they speak the ‘truth’. It is the experience of not only a writer, but also of many Dalits in this country. It makes the reader feel one with the writer and gives identity to the writer. It is kind of an opening to assert and free oneself.

J.S.: What is the main theme of *Sangathi*?

Bama: ‘Dalit women’ is the main theme of *Sangathi*. It reveals their protest and strategical ways and means of resistance in times of oppression and rejection. It celebrates their resilient nature and builds up hope. It talks about the strength that enables them to swim against the current and live with zeal and zest.

J.S.: Do you consider your writing ‘militant’?

Bama: To a certain extent, yes. The language that I use, the content that I write, the characters that I create in my writings and the values and convictions that I advocate through these characters are all of militant nature. I strongly believe that writing itself is a political act and it is one of the weapons that I use to fight against this dehumanising caste practice.

J.S.: Why are the Brahminical forces still at the helm of affairs in this country?

Bama: The Brahminical forces are strongly injected in most areas and in most of the minds of our people. It is strongly rooted in the spiritual soil and has a religious sanction. Our people who are highly religious accept anything and everything without questioning if it is given in the name of ‘God’ and religion. Brahmins who had the advantage of getting education and employment unlike the other people stubbornly believe that they are the intelligent people and cling on to power and authority. The nature of Brahminism is such that it easily permeates everywhere and gradually and silently kills everything in order to establish its ideology.

J.S.: Are you satisfied with the critical corpus by the academicians and critics?

Bama: To a certain extent yes. There are some good works.

J.S.: Please mention some of your works of resistance. What do you resist?

Bama: My second novel *Sangathi*, third novel *Vanmam*, fourth novel *Manuci* and most of all my short stories are some of my works of resistance. I resist all kinds of

social injustices, oppressions and atrocities in any form that dehumanises and humiliates a person – it may be based on caste, class or gender.

J.S.: If a non-Dalit writer writes about Dalit life, would you consider that as Dalit writing?

Bama: I'll consider that as writing about Dalits and not as 'Dalit writing'.

J.S.: Why do you need a separate term 'Dalit Feminism'? How is it different from feminism in India?

Bama: Feminism in India emphasizes the empowerment of women in general in terms of equality in all its dimensions. It is true that all women all over the world suffer because they are women. In India the problems faced by Dalit women are entirely different from that of non-Dalit women. In the Indian context, women suffer a lot in the family because it is man-centred; in the society because it is patriarchal and male-chauvinistic, and religion justifies and legitimises both these unjust institutions and mind-sets favouring men alone. In addition to these, Dalit women face other problems because our society is not only a male-dominated society, but it is an upper-caste male-dominated society. Due to untouchability and caste based violence and atrocities Dalit women are tortured and humiliated even by upper caste women. So, the term 'feminism' in India is not enough to encompass the liberative perspectives, aspirations, values, convictions and dreams of Dalit women. How can any ideology of emancipation and empowerment that does not include the annihilation of caste in its agenda and is not committed to the task of restoring the self-esteem and self-respect of Dalit women who do not have equal social status like other non-Dalit women, make any sense to us? Therefore I feel we need separate term 'Dalit feminism'.

J.S. : Please cite three examples of Dalit feminism in your works.

Bama: Firstly, my short story 'Chilli Powder'. This short story is about some Dalit women who collected some weeds and grass to feed their cattle from a non-Dalit woman's field and were chased away by that landlady who threw chilli powder on their faces. Pachayamma who was the main character in that story nicknamed that landlady 'Chilli powder' and irritated her by calling her by that name very often. She made fun of her whenever and wherever she saw her and terrified her together with her other companions. This rebelling, resisting and fighting tendency helps them to rise above this kind of situation and to rebuild themselves in any situation of inhuman treatment. By making fun of the situations and persons they try to establish themselves and overcome the humiliations and hurts caused by caste and class discriminations.

Secondly, my second novel *Sangathi*. *Sangathi* talks about a variety of Dalit women who try to liberate themselves from caste, class and gender inequalities. They use different tactics, different strategies in words and actions to establish their human

dignity and self-respect. These women try their best to breathe freely in spite of the suffocating experiences both in their families and in society, by their brave and humorous attitudes and approaches. They fight verbally and physically to live as human beings with dignity. Their culture strengthens them even though their hard labour breaks them. The feeling of being together with other suffering women and sharing their joys and sorrows freely and without any inhibition, gives them a sense of belonging and enables them to bring in an element of celebration into their dreary lives of every day suffering and violence.

Generally speaking in most of my writings (mainly short stories) I have recorded in depth Dalit women's relationships, their kinship and fellow feeling and their appreciation of nature. Their culture which is imbued with a deep feeling and sense that they are daughters of this mother earth enables them to embrace nature with a deep sense of oneness and love. It is this that makes them humane, human and alive. Their whole life under the sky is in contact and mixed up with soil, air, water and fire, and this union with nature helps them to live an ecologically harmonious life. They love animals and birds, trees and plants and they talk to them with such tenderness. This intimacy reduces the stress and strain of their daily struggles caused by this caste based and caste oriented society. This frees them and eases their hearts to live their life one day at a time. Their culture of rebellion and provocation keeps them alive and active.

J.S.: Do you subscribe to the term 'Dalit womanism.'

Bama: Alice Walker who coined the term 'womanism' specifically pointed to 'black womanism'. Yes, I subscribe to this term 'Dalit womanism.' I think this term will express the varied nuances of the raw, colourful, revolutionary, and earthy and grass root level existence, experiences and ecstasies of Dalit women. For a Dalit woman, her struggle, her priority is to assert and establish her humanity more than her femininity, and it is this that makes her life and expresses her personality. Her rebelling, resisting and resilient nature makes her strong and gentle at the same time and so the term 'Dalit womanism' is more appropriate than Dalit feminism.

J.S.: What makes you write, 'We must crush all these institutions that use caste to bully us into submission and demonstrate that among human beings there are none who are high or low?'

Bama: In my life wherever I have lived, I have experienced and am experiencing the pain of caste discrimination which divides and degrades human beings. Even now my neighbour who is an 'upper caste' woman lets all the dirty gutter water in front of my house. When I pointed out this to her she stubbornly and angrily refused to stop it. She uses abusive words every day whenever I go out of my house. Now I am really tired of telling that woman and she continues with her inhuman behaviour. Others who

witness this daily don't even oppose this because she is an upper-caste woman. She deliberately does this because I am a Dalit woman. For her Dalits ought to live in a filthy and stinking area, and she is not able to digest the fact that I have built a house and I live a decent life in front of her. If some upper-caste family were to live near her instead of me, she won't dare to do this. It is a daily struggle for me. Even if we move to an urban area, we are always treated with contempt and cruelty once they come to know our caste.

Not only in the neighbourhood but in all religious and educational institutions beginning from primary schools, in offices, in working places and almost in all walks of life I have seen a lot of injustices done in the name of caste. The dominating and oppressive forces paralyse people constantly and continuously.

In Rohit Vemula's words, our birth is a fatal accident and from womb to tomb we are compelled to do menial jobs and to live as servants of all. We are segregated by caste which is decided by birth and which follows us even after death. We long for equality of human persons and by all means we want to demonstrate that among human beings there are none who are high or low. We want to annihilate caste which permeates the whole fibre of Indian society. The 'high' and 'low' status of human being is created mainly by caste which is irreversible, needs to be destroyed in order to promote equality, fraternity and liberty. Here I want to end with Dr Ambedkar's final words which I deeply cherish:

My final words of advice to you are educate, agitate and organize; have faith in yourself. With justice on our side I do not see how we can lose our battle. The battle to me is matter of joy. The battle is in the fullest sense spiritual. There is nothing material or social in it. For ours is a battle not for wealth or for power. It is a battle for freedom. It is the battle of reclamation of human personality.

J.S.: How about translation of your works into English?

Bama: Most of my works have been translated into English and has been published by Oxford University Press – India. My translators tried their level best to keep the spirit and flavour of my writings. I do appreciate their hard work and I'm happy with them.

J.S.: How do you pass your idle moments?

Bama: I hardly have any idle moments. As a single woman, teaching full time in a primary school, doing all the household duties myself and the connected with outside works, I am tightly engaged. Amidst this hectic schedule, I steal out some time to read and write. Most of my holidays are spent in attending literary meetings and giving

talks to students, women and teachers. So no moments to idle away!

J.S.: Any regrets?

Bama: I am happy with what I am and what I have. The only regret is the realisation of my inability to do some concrete actions against caste discrimination and its endless violence in my own village.

N. B. The conversation was published in an e-journal. This is for the first time that it is being published in a print ISSN version.

Santali Poetry by Sari Dharam Hansda in English Translation

Pritha Kundu

‘Sari Dharam Hansda’ is the pen-name of the Santali poet Basudeb Hansda. ‘Sari Dharam’ in Santali means true or authentic religion. Born in 1955 in the village Kumarda in Binpur under Jhargram sub-division of undivided Midnapore the poet belonged to a poor family living on farming. His parents were Padan and Naha Hansda, who, amidst all their financial hardships, worked hard to let their son pursue higher education. Basudeb Hansda completed his schooling in Joypur Junior High School and Shilda Radhacharan Institution (H. S.), and graduated from Shilda Chandrasekhar Mahavidyalaya. Inspired by predecessor-poets like Sarada Prasad Kisku, he started writing poetry in his youth. Besides poetry, he has been the author of several short stories and scripts for Santali plays and *jatrapala* since his youth. It took time for him to get recognition; which came in the form of the Sahitya Akademi Award (November 2013). Last year he received the West Bengal Santali Academy award, and very recently he has been awarded the Babulal Murmu Award from the All India Writers’ Association (December 2017). Most of his poems faithfully represent the struggles, hardships and the existential crisis suffered by the people belonging to the tribal and peripheral communities. He pleads to them in an inspiring voice to come forward. At the same time in his poetry we recognize a tone of regret seeing the loss of authenticity and negligence towards the heritage evident among the present-generation members of the Santali community. With the poet’s kind permission, the present translator has attempted to render some of his representative poems into English.

Self-scrutiny

Original: *Apin tulau jakha*

You are in conflict with your
own people, and so you lag behind
in the struggle for your right.
You have lost all your strength
To enlighten yourself.

Who is intimate, and who is the other –

You should have known. But your life,
Full of self-pleasure, has not let it be.

Without a look at yourself,
Trying to find out another's fault,
You have committed further offence.
So you have given birth to jealousy,
Having lost your heritage.

The Black Crown

Original: *Hende Kolga*

The black crown hangs upon your head,
Floating in the empty air, loose and unsteady,
Wiggles in the air like an intriguing worm,
as if, showering a rain of advices
and the irritated ears collapse in deafness.
(This) generates astonishment, unfeeling sensations of obstruction.
Due to inefficiency – in the cultivated, fertile land
Grow withered fruits.
You are proud. In your pride
You don't hesitate to tread on the truth.
And never try to find a solution to the crisis.

O Day-labourers!

Original: *Eho Din Khatam Har*

O day-labourers!
Stand up confident with all your strength
Make this rough and shattered ways of the earth
even and smooth ,
O day-labourers!
Take a strong hold of your daily companions
Your axes, spades,
Baskets and crowbars—

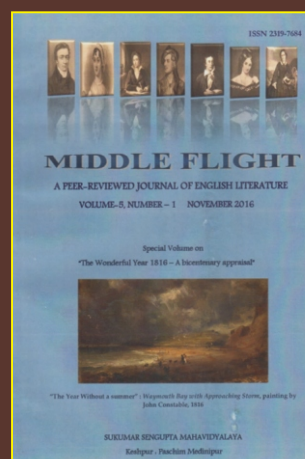
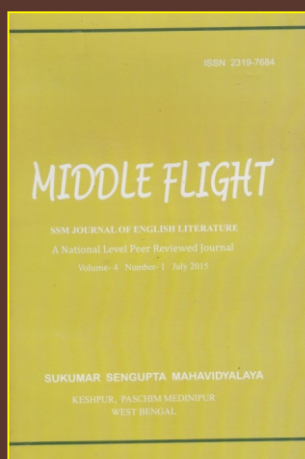
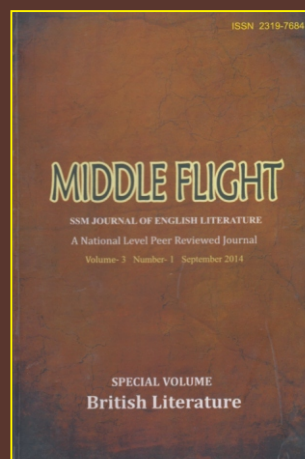
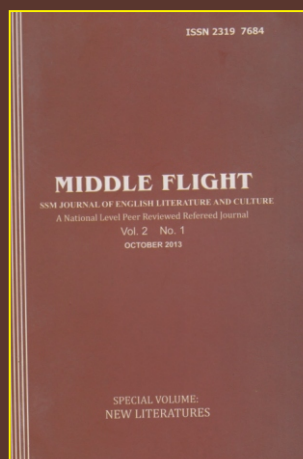
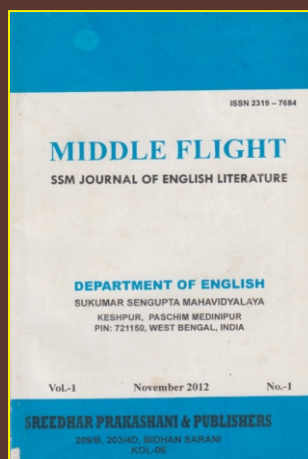
With all the equipments you have,
Sow the seeds of awakening spirit
In the bosom of this creation.
You will be able to create
And also to destroy pinnacles high-headed
Stay not silent in the struggle for your rights
Have courage and do protest.
O day-labourers!

Your burnt-up bodies, rusty bones
Are broken up in fragments and getting sold so cheaply.
Their real value is not even mentioned.
When are you going to raise a bold protest?
O day-labourers!

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